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Consequences of a graying world

Aging populations pose big problems

Jonathan Grant and Stijn Hoorens

Cambridge, England – While attention is focused on efforts to make the world go green, the world is also changing dramatically because it is going gray. People over age 65 are starting to outnumber those under 16 in many countries.

By 2040, one in four Europeans will be more than 65 years old, up from one in eight in 1990. The Chinese population is aging even more rapidly, to the extent that its total population will start to decline in the early 2030s.

Numerous studies have estimated the probable impact of population aging, from the potentially devastating effects on an unprepared welfare state to shortages of blood for transfusions.

Pension provisions will be stretched to the limit. The traditional model of the working young paying for the retired old will not work if the latter group is twice the size of the former.

But a 2006 survey of 20 countries and territories by banking giant HSBC revealed that, while 43 percent of respondents feel they should fund their own retirement, 30 percent expect to be supported by local or national government. Final salary pension plans are already disappearing, and governments will have to search hard for new ways to pay for their aging citizens.

Rising healthcare costs

In addition, as the population ages, healthcare costs will rise. By 2050, half of all age-related social expenditure will be taken up by health and long-term care in countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

There are two driving forces

behind population aging. The first should be celebrated – we're living longer. In 1901, life expectancy in Britain for men was 45 years and for women 49. Today most Britons expect to reach their 80s, at least. In Britain in 2004, there were about 9,000 people older than 100.

Better healthcare, nutrition, and sanitation have all contributed to increases in life expectancy, and the trend appears to be accelerating. In the 20 years between 1985 and 2005, life expectancy at birth in Britain increased by 5.1 years for men and by 3.6 years for women.

The second driver of population aging is that Europeans are having fewer babies. The social revolution brought about by the introduction of the contraceptive pill in the 1960s enabled many women to control their reproductive lives.

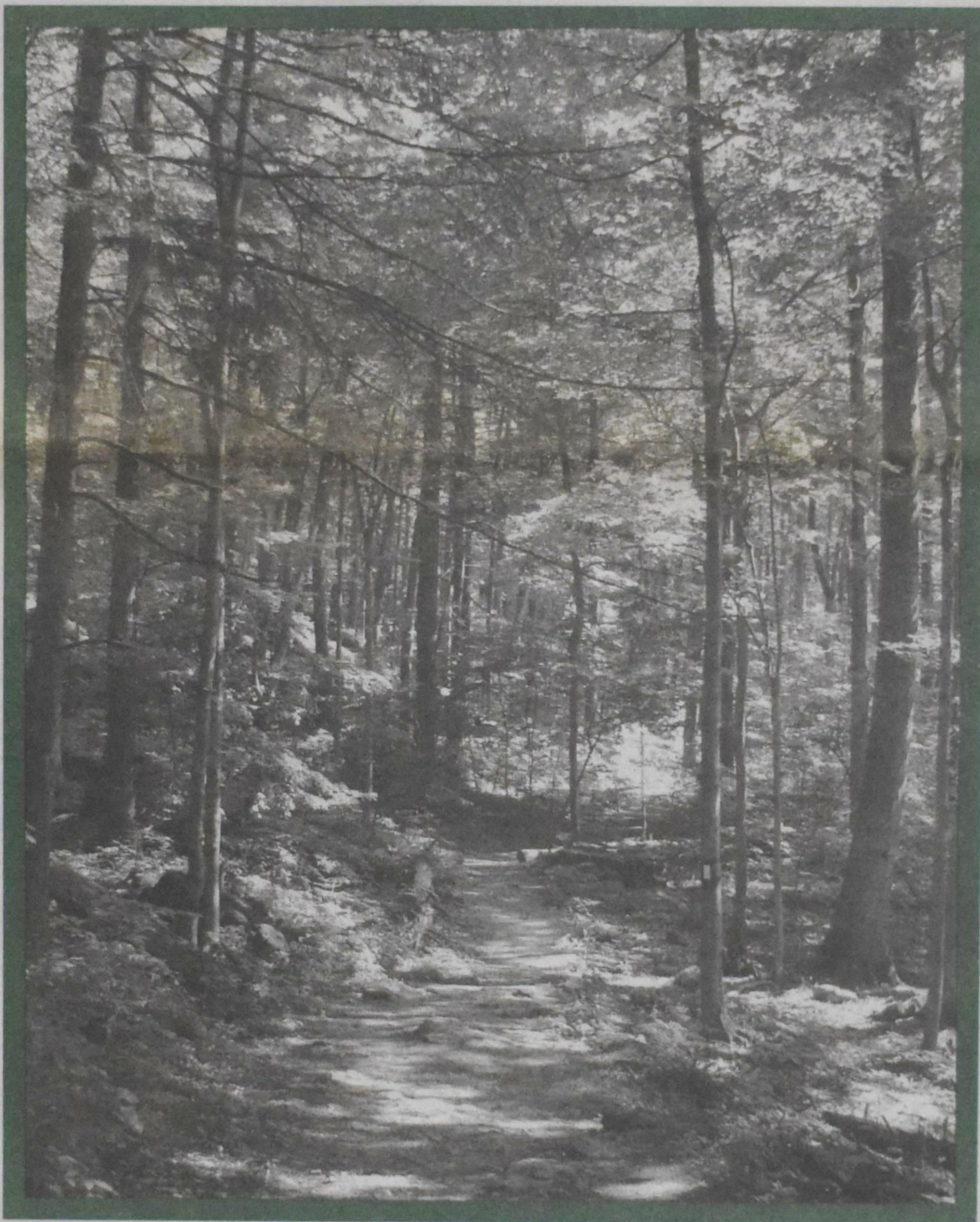
Women were able to decide when and how many children to have. The pill gave them the ability to combine career and family aspirations in a way that was previously impossible.

But the advent of choice has brought an unintended consequence. Many women now delay childbirth to the point where it becomes much less likely that they will conceive naturally. Twice as many women remain childless today as did in the 1940s, and family size is shrinking.

The options for mitigating the effects of population aging are limited and complex. The main possibilities are welfare reform, increasing immigration, or raising fertility rates.

All three strategies have massive financial and political implications. Many governments shy away from

See **Graying** on page 3



Find a sun dappled path and follow it
under the leafy canopies of rustling trees
through the dark, cool shadows
stepping softly on the yielding earth
stepping over bare roots and deadfall
to emerge renewed where you began.

Enjoy your vacation

News

Could Pakistan fall to extremists?

Analysts say Washington's fears that Islamic extremists will take control of Pakistan are overblown.

Mark Sappenfield and David Montero

Islamabad, Pakistan — The US Congress recently held hearings on whether Pakistan was honoring its promises to help the United States fight terrorism and nuclear nonproliferation.

At the outset, before criticism of what one administration official has called America's greatest ally in the war on terror mounted, the committee chairman made a sobering statement.

"US policy widely attempts to work with and pressure the Pakistan government ... but not to a destabilizing degree," said Rep. Ed Royce (R) of California during the May 2006 hearing. "The possibility of radical Islamists seizing control of Pakistan's government and nuclear arsenal is a serious concern."

This fear of nuclear-armed mullahs has played a motivating role in American policy toward Pakistan since Sept. 11, experts say. It has led the Bush administration to back a military ruler seen to be strong and supportive of American interests, despite the fact that he overthrew a democratically elected government.

Yet on the ground in Pakistan — and increasingly in the halls of Washington — this fear is seen to be specious. The trends of past election returns, combined with the strength of the largely secular military, suggest that it is extremely unlikely that religious extremists could ever come to power in Pakistan.

"It's hogwash," says Seth Jones, an antiterror analyst at the RAND Corp., a strategic consultancy in Arlington, Va.

The debate comes at a particularly sensitive time. Since the controversial sacking of Pakistan's Supreme Court chief justice on March 9, widespread street protests have left President Pervez Musharraf's regime at its most vulnerable since it seized power in 1999.

Pakistan's history of religious moderation

For its part, the United States has stood by Mr. Musharraf. In recent days, two top State Department



Pres. Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan meets with the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Peter Pace

officials, Richard Boucher and John Negroponte, visited with Musharraf in Islamabad on Saturday, June 30. Both officials said they trust him to address one of Pakistan's most controversial issues: whether Musharraf can run for president again while remaining Army chief.

"I think this is something that President Musharraf himself is going to want to decide and this is a matter that is up to him," said Mr. Negroponte.

But the change of power in the U.S. Congress this year has brought new scrutiny to the idea that Musharraf is the only man who can prevent Pakistani-sponsored nuclear terrorism.

To maintain his rule, some Congressional democrats say, Musharraf has had to marginalize Pakistan's largest parties, which are secular, and instead rely on religious parties to give him some patina of support. In doing so, however, Musharraf has suppressed the moderating elements of Pakistani society.

The shift comes as extremism in Pakistan has reached unprecedented levels during the past two years. For the first time, Taliban-linked militants have targeted government ministers and Army personnel in suicide bombings and ratcheted up violence in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province.

Yet Pakistani analysts overwhelmingly say that the best way to combat terrorism here is not with military force, but with a true democracy. Pakistan has been a democracy for 30 of the 60 years since it gained its independence. During those years, religious parties never won more than 12 percent of the vote in any election.

"As impressive and worrying

as this total appears to some, the Islamist vote remains limited to slightly more than one-tenth of the electorate despite heavy manipulations in its favor by the state machinery," writes Frédéric Grare in a 2006 report for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

The statistics play against common perceptions of Pakistan abroad. Some 70 percent of the population of Pakistan comes from the lowland areas of Punjab and upper Sindh, where cultural traditions and economic aspirations hew to those of moderate India. Likewise, more than 84 percent of the Army officer corps comes from Punjab and Sindh.

Because of this, the military rulers who have run Pakistan for the other half of its existence have never dismantled the democratic system. Rather, they have bent it to their will to create a sheen of democracy.

To do this, however, Musharraf — like the three military rulers that preceded him — has relied on fringe religious parties.

These parties have deep grass-roots connections and formidable street power, making them a convenient political ally for military rulers, who otherwise would lack popular support bases of their own. In return, religious parties receive disproportionate influence.

"The first step to cleaning up extremists is to make sure extremists are marginalized," says Samina Ahmed of the International Crisis Group's office in Islamabad. "Musharraf is so dependent on them for propping up his political order."

"You've got to get rid of that prop," she adds.

Taliban turn gunsights to Afghan police

Jason Motlagh

KANDAHAR — Afghanistan Col. Muhammad Hussein could not hide his frustration with the new recruits.

It was the penultimate day of a 10-day training crash course for a rag-tag batch of auxiliary police. The fledgling Afghan government needs the new recruits to enforce the law amid a mounting guerrilla insurgency, and the men were far from ready for the mean streets of this former Taliban capital.

Colonel Hussein barked at one young man for not keeping his red simulation weapon trained on a suspect vehicle during a search exercise. But training difficulties were only half of the problem. Today, Hussein says, there is no guarantee the cash-strapped state will be able to replace the recruit's fake gun with a real one.

"The real threat is now against [the police]," says Hekmat Karzai, head of the Kabul-based Center for Conflict and Peace Studies, which focuses on security and terrorism analysis. "Strategically, it makes sense to attack Afghan security forces where morally it gives people a complex about whether it is worth joining."

The growing strength of the Afghan National Army, which has inflicted heavy casualties against the Taliban this year with robust NATO support and improved training and equipment, has prompted a resurgent Taliban to target the poorly equipped police officers, who each receive only slightly more than half a soldier's pay.

Western officials say they are committed to doing this by working within the current regime.

"Washington should not press for Musharraf's ouster, since this year's elections are only the first step along the way to disengaging the military from domestic politics," writes Daniel Markey, a former State Department official, in the coming issue of Foreign Affairs magazine.

For Musharraf, extremism has its benefits

Yet here, the sense is that the Musharraf regime at times allows extremism to fester for its own ends.

"When it is a means of attracting money from the West, [the government] creates such issues," says Mufti Muhammad Naeem, the head of Binoria University, a

Meanwhile, the lack of funds has left the police virtually empty-handed in the fight against guerrillas armed with heavy weapons such as mortars and rocket-propelled grenades, says Interior Ministry spokesman Zemarai Bashary.

The Taliban's hit-and-run tactics have killed more than 300 police in the last three months, according to the Interior Ministry, making this the worst year ever for police casualties.

"What the police have to face them [with] are AK-47s, and, at the maximum, PKMs. That's it," Mr. Bashary opined, referring to a higher-caliber Soviet-made machine gun.

Critical posts in areas beyond the reach of multinational forces are harder to fill as a result, while many wearing a badge engage in graft and other criminal activities to make ends meet, eroding public faith.

In some districts with more than 100,000 people, there are just 25 to 30 police stretched thin by daily law enforcement demands — battling insurgents when necessary and lending a hand in drug eradication, something that makes them easy targets, say Afghan officials.

In what amounted to both a literal and symbolic blow to state authority, the June 17 bus bombing in the capital — the deadliest since the fall of the Taliban in 2001 — left at least 35 people dead on the doorstep of police headquarters — most of them police trainees.

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prominent madrassah in Karachi.

Western officials strongly disagree with this assertion. "The position of the US has been consistent — we do not see any duplicity in the government of Pakistan," says the US diplomat in Islamabad.

To be sure, Musharraf has offered the US a measure of stability and a sure ally in uncertain times. But Pakistan has experience in managing political turmoil and transition, says Syeda Abida Hussain, ambassador to the US from 1991 to 1993.

"He's the fourth [military ruler] we've had," she says. "We've done all this before."

Mark Sappenfield and David Montero are correspondents for The Christian Science Monitor

News

Chinese bishops hope papal letter will improve links with Rome

By Francis Wong

Hong Kong, (ENI) – Catholic leaders in China say an open letter from Pope Benedict XVI to the faithful in their country has religious and political significance for China-Vatican relations.

Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kium of Hong Kong said he hoped China's leaders would "read the Pope's letter from a religious perspective, not a political one." In the past, Cardinal Zen has been a critic of China's stance on human rights and religious freedom.

The Pope's 55-page letter, issued on June 30, called for Catholics on the Chinese mainland who belong to government-recognized communities to unite under his authority with those belonging to clandestine groups aligned with the Vatican.

In his statement, issued on the same day, Cardinal Zen said he hoped the Pope's letter would become "a common starting point for dialogue" between Chinese leaders and local clergy.

The government-approved Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association refuses to recognize the authority of the Vatican. Many Catholic clergy and lay people, however, have stayed loyal to the church in Rome. This is something that has angered the Chinese authorities and, according to some observers, has also resulted in persecution of those who have gone "underground" for worship.

On mainland China, Bishop Luke Li Jingfeng of Fengxiang told AsiaNews that the papal letter made the right call for unity. The bishop said he was "hopeful that Beijing might try a sincere dialogue with the Holy See."

Li is not a member of the government-approved Patriotic Association. However, since 2004 the Chinese government has recognized him as a bishop of the church.

The Patriotic Association's vice-chairperson, Anthony Liu Bainian, said on July 1 that he hoped the papal letter would improve the relationship between China and the Vatican.

Beijing has said that improved contacts depend on the Holy See breaking off diplomatic relations with Taiwan, and

practising "non interference" in internal Chinese matters. Observers have interpreted this as a rejection of Vatican demands that it appoint bishops in China.

Liu noted that previous papal letters had been critical of communism and spoke of excommunicating members of the state-backed church. But, he said, the present situation is different and Benedict's letter was a demonstration of his love and concern for Chinese Catholics.

The papal letter criticized the Patriotic Association and similar Chinese groups by saying that their claim, "to place themselves above the bishops and to guide the life of the ecclesial community, does not correspond to Catholic doctrine."

"The most significant thing about this letter is that it exists at all – that there is a letter to Chinese Catholics from the Pope. And it will serve as a test case for the much-trumpeted new openness toward Rome of the official Church," said Raphaela Schmid, director in Rome of the Becket Institute for Religious Liberty, and an expert on China-Vatican relations.

In reply, Beijing has reiterated demands that the Vatican must break its diplomatic links with Taiwan, and practice "non-interference" in China's internal affairs if it wishes to improve its relations with the communist-ruled state.

"China's stance on improving relations with the Vatican is consistent. Namely, the Vatican should sever the so-called diplomatic ties with Taiwan, and recognize the People's Republic of China is the sole government representing China," the official Xinhua news agency quoted Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Qin Gang as saying. The Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson also said the Vatican should not intervene in his country's internal affairs, including in the name of religion.

In his message, Pope Benedict acknowledged the existence in China of greater religious liberty than in the past but he also referred to "grave limitations" on freedom that could "suffocate pastoral activity".

Graying ... cont. from p. 1

taking the drastic steps needed in these areas, tending to be more concerned with the next election than with the next generation.

The option least tangled up with political will is to introduce policies aimed at encouraging people to have more children – in other words, reducing the social, economic, and biological barriers to childbirth.

Need family-friendly policies

Countries that have "family-friendly" policies – particularly

those that help mothers to raise children and work – have managed to maintain or even slightly raise their fertility rates. Such policies include tax incentives for families with more than one child, flexible working options, and maternity and paternity leave.

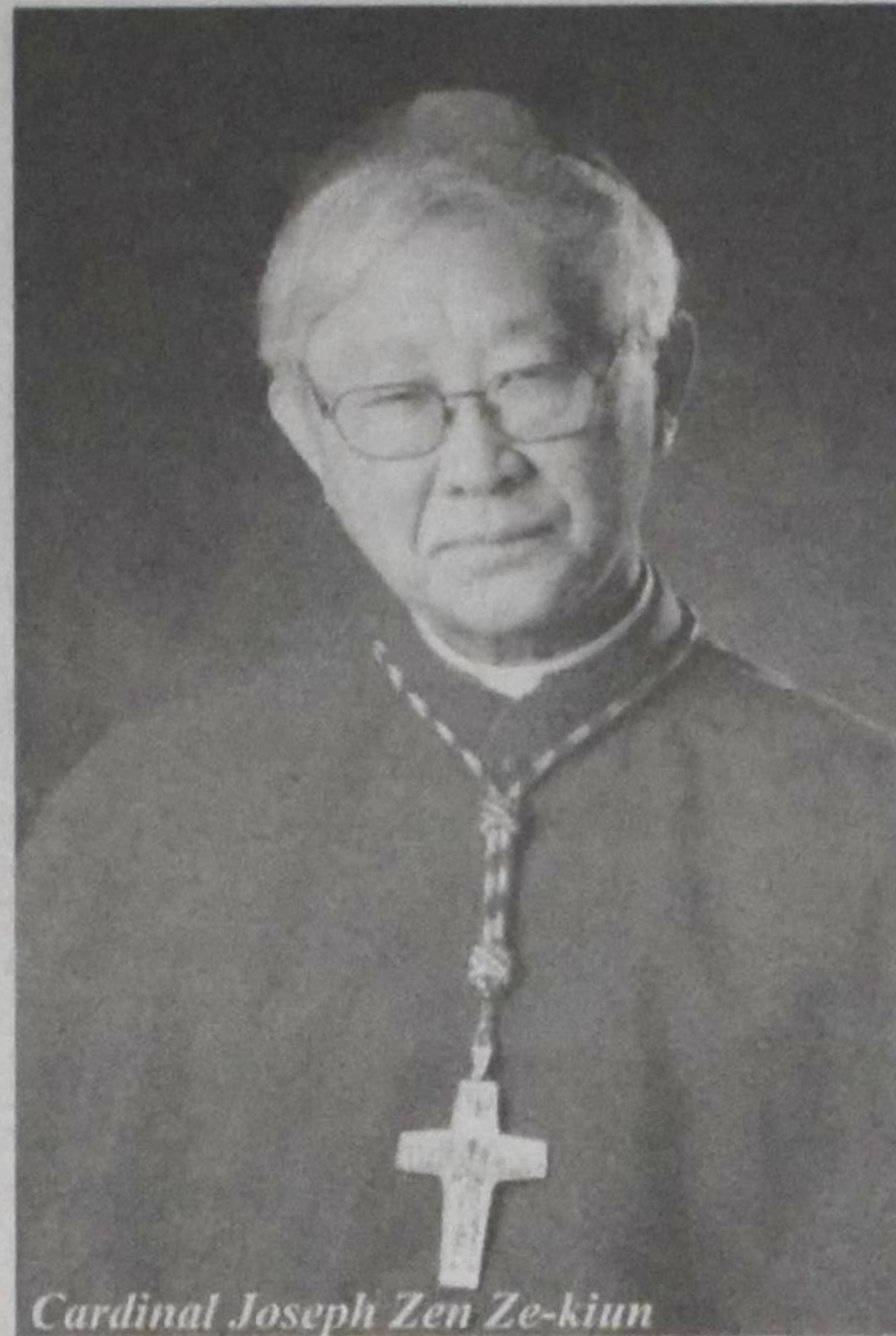
France now has the second-highest fertility rate in Europe, due in part to the introduction of pro-natalist policies at the very earliest indication of population decline.

As a larger percentage of the population falls into the 60-plus category, governments will not

be able to ignore the graying of society. On pensions, healthcare, and other issues, retirees will have a louder voice as their numbers increase, and they will use it.

They did in the last British election. More than twice as many over-65s voted as did 18-24 year-olds. Elected officials know that if they ignore these voters, they risk being forced into early retirement themselves at the next election.

Jonathan Grant is president and Stijn Hoorens is a senior analyst at RAND Europe, an independent nonprofit research organization.



Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kium

The Pope said he wished to reach an accord with Beijing on the "choice of candidates for the episcopate, the publication of the appointment of bishops, and the recognition – concerning civil effects where necessary – of the new bishops on the part of the civil authorities".

A July 2 editorial in the Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post* noted, "In expressing trust that an agreement can be reached, the Vatican has in mind the arrangement in communist Vietnam, where it proposes a few names and the government chooses."

The Pope's letter did not mention the issue of Taiwan. However, in an accompanying note, the Vatican repeated its readiness to transfer its embassy from Taiwan to China "at any time", in the event of an agreement with Beijing. In writing to Catholics in China, Pope Benedict urged them to move beyond "personal positions or viewpoints, born of painful or difficult experiences", in order to arrive at "pardon and reconciliation".

According to Vatican figures, there are now 8 to 12 million Catholics in China. The statistics do not differentiate between those who belong to the officially recognized church, and those who are part of clandestine communities.

Hong Kong Christian leaders urge democracy street protests

By Francis Wong

Hong Kong (ENI) – A Christian coalition in Hong Kong has called on the faithful to take to the streets to lobby for universal suffrage as the territory prepares to mark its 10th anniversary as a Special Administrative Region of China.

"In view of political development, we haven't made any progress. We don't know when there will be universal suffrage. The election of the Hong Kong Chief Executive is only the game of a 800-member election committee, nothing to do with the public," Grace Lam, executive secretary of the Christians for Hong Kong Society told journalists on June 21. "As Christians, we need to fight for a just and democratic political system," Lam said.

Britain returned its former colony of Hong Kong to Chinese rule on July 1, 1997.

A policy of "One Country, Two Systems" was brokered for Hong Kong's first 50 years after the departure of the British in order to allow the new administrative region of China to have its own non-communist system.

However, Hong Kong advocates of a more democratic society have pointed out that the system does not make provision for the leaders of the territory to be elected by universal suffrage.

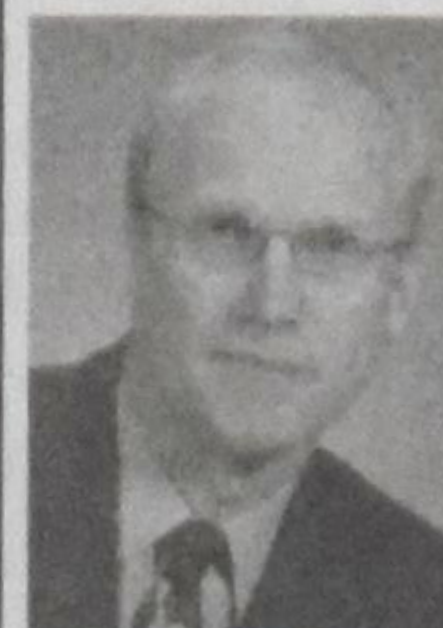
"The 800-member election committee was inclined to its interest holders – businessmen and professionals – and not for the citizen," said Teresa Yip, program secretary of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese.

The Christians for Hong Kong Society includes the Hong Kong Catholic Commission for Labour Affairs and ecumenical bodies such as the Student Christian Movement and the Hong Kong Women's Christian Council.

Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kium of Hong Kong has also encouraged Catholics to join the protests. "It has been 10 years since reunification. The situation of marginalized people has not improved but is deteriorating," Cardinal Zen told journalists. "We need to express our desire clearly: to have universal suffrage as soon as possible," the cardinal said.

Christians make up about 10 percent of Hong Kong's 6.9 million people.

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Editorial

Contending with cancer

Harry der Nederlanden

A few weeks ago, hearing that my cancer had returned, a friend sent me an article by John Piper titled "Don't waste your cancer." I appreciate the act. It is an act of love.

John Piper is a well-known Reformed theologian and the author of several books, and he can be relied upon to bring to his reflections years of Scripture study. His counsel is always worth listening to. He is also worth wrestling with, and I take issue with some things he says because I respect his thoughts. In fact, I admit he may be more right than I am, but my way of dealing with cancer differs in some respects from his – though not, I think, in essentials.

His article is framed around ten statements, each beginning: "You will waste your cancer if..."

Number 1 is: "You will waste your cancer if you do not believe it is designed for you by God."

That is quite a mouthful. Piper is concerned, on the one hand, to emphasize God's sovereignty, and on the other, to assure us that getting cancer does not put us under the power of something over which God has no control. Nevertheless, in Christ – and, indeed, already in the Old Testament – God is revealed as the healer. David speaks of the Lord as the one "who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases." Disease and death are closely linked with the effects of the Fall and with the forces of evil that Christ has come to defeat. Many of the miraculous signs that accompany his proclamation of the now and coming Kingdom are healings. His will for us and for his creation is that all things will be restored to their wholeness, that all tears will be wiped away and that there be no disease and death.

So I find it hard to think of God designing this cancer – or any disease – for me. At the same time, I can still confess that what is happening to me does not somehow carry me outside the realm of God's will and purposes. In the final analysis, God will somehow – how is a deep mystery that no amount of thought can dispel – include this disease in the triumph of Jesus Christ over all the adversaries of God's loving purposes for us. Just as that terrible enemy death becomes nothing more than a porter to a glorious new existence, so this cancer cannot withstand the healing breath of God's Spirit, for he is the God of life and of the living.

This cancer is, therefore, not a sign that I or something that's happening to me has slipped out of God's hands, but it is a sign that the power of death is still strong in this world. God no more designed this cancer than he designed sin and death.

2. "You will waste your cancer if you believe it is a curse and not a gift."

Piper quotes several Bible texts which suggest that since Christ has borne the curse for those who believe, nothing that happens to a believer is a curse. True, but disease, like war and hunger, injustice and murder, is still part of the curse that descended on the earth and humanity when we fell away from God. God did not send this cancer to curse me, but it is not a gift either. Along with my family and friends, I still very much experience the cursedness of this disease. Faith does not obligate me to overlook the pain and grief caused by cancer and by all those things that still frustrate God's Kingdom here in Middle Earth. At the same time, we do not experience the full force of cancer's or death's curse, for it's power to remove us from the love of God has been broken by Jesus Christ.

So I don't believe that my wife and I are obligated to say to God, "Thank you for this wonderful gift of cancer which is eating at my guts." I did everything I could to fight this cancer the first time around, and I will do so again. Would I repudiate a divine gift? The gift that God promises is life – eternal life.

3. "You will waste your cancer if you seek comfort from your odds rather than from God."

I deeply agree with this statement; however, human calculation of odds will inevitably play a role in my cancer treatment. It is a great temptation, of course, to become so wrapped up in the medical technology and treatments that we are in danger of entrusting ourselves to machinery rather than to God. But in weighing my decision whether to take follow-up chemotherapy and radiation, I very much considered the odds. Had the odds been close to 100 percent that I was cancer-free, I would not have undergone that nasty regimen of treatment.

Had I not taken those treatments, I would now undoubtedly be accusing myself of not doing everything in my power and in the power of the science available to me to extend my life and so continue to serve God. God cares for us and comforts us also through such intermediaries as doctors and chemotherapy and calculations of odds.

4. "You will waste your cancer if you refuse to think about death."

True, and I would add that given the aura surrounding the word "cancer" that is probably the first thought that enters your mind when you are told that you have cancer. Thinking about death is almost inevitable. However, I would give almost the very opposite advice: don't spend too much time thinking about death. As long as you are alive, think about living. Cancer isn't necessarily a death sentence, and even if you know that your particular cancer will eventually kill you, the salient thing is that you are alive. And it is important to think of yourself not as dying but as still living before the face of God and as called to share the life you've been given.

During my first bout with colon cancer six years ago, I lived in denial. I resolved to focus on the sunshine at the other end of the tunnel and to enjoy as much as I could the company of those sharing the treatment room with me and those treating me. We actually had a lot of laughs.

There's no need to deepen the gloom. There is a time for lamentation, but don't be in a hurry to get there.

5. "You will waste your cancer if you think that 'beating' cancer means staying alive rather than cherishing Christ."

Again, there's much truth in that. As Piper says, "Cancer does not win if you die." Right now I'm focused on finishing this editorial and this issue of C.C. If I think that everything depends upon my meeting the deadline and getting the paper finished rather than cherishing Christ, my priorities are screwed up. But life can't be reduced to those either/or choices. When you are being treated for cancer, you are in a battle for your life, and 'beating' the cancer does become very central. That can become obsessive and unwholesome. But just because your life takes on the appearance of a military campaign against the enemy cancer doesn't mean that you are no longer thereby cherishing Christ.

If you cherish the gift of life given to you by God and the bonds of fellowship, you will do all in your power to sustain that gift. At the same time, you know that the gift of life cannot be stolen from you, for it is stored up in heaven for you with Jesus Christ.

I see that I won't have space to address all ten points made by Piper, so I skip to:

7. "You will waste your cancer if you let it drive you into solitude instead of deepening your relationships with manifest affection."

The fight against cancer can draw you into a whirlwind of activities. Fellow church members devote more attention to you and you get more visits. Your family begins to hover a little more. You're constantly seeing different doctors and sitting in waiting rooms with other patients. You may end up in a hospital bed more than once, and you will be pricked, poked and processed by numerous medical technicians. It is good that Piper warns us against withdrawing deep into ourselves, but I would also celebrate the healing power of solitude.

Getting away for long walks in the woods was very good for me. As I walked under the trees and felt God's nearness in the beauties of nature, I could feel a palpable restoration of balance. There's a calm and steadiness that flows from walking or sitting alone in the woods and simply being quiet as God speaks in the rustling grass and leaves and in the burble of the creeks.

It's true that we must guard against withdrawing as if in preparation for death. Although I'm battling cancer, so are my wife and kids. So are many others. We are all engaged in a battle against the enemy and we all need one another for mutual encouragement. So while I'm suffering cancer's effects very directly, I must also be aware of the needs and pain of those around me. It's not all about me and letting people minister to me. In the midst of my disease I must also minister to others. But spending some time in solitude strengthens me to do that.

10. "You will waste your cancer if you fail to use it as a means of witness to the truth and glory of Christ."

I end with Piper's last statement, to which I can only say Amen! I would add, though, that such witness need not be forced and didactic. The prospect of death may spur us to try to hammer home – in our children, perhaps – all those truths we failed to impress on them before. But there's no need to seize others by the collar because you feel that death has you by the collar. It is the Spirit who softens human hearts: trust him to let your lived witness speak.

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Canada

Poetry

Evening walk in Short Hills

The shrinking sun ahead
stalls at the far neck of the valley
caught in black trees
behind prison bars

On both sides darkening
woods hover closer over the trail
casting dark nets
that catch golden leaves
like leaping fish

Birdsong cascades down
circles lifts and sprays like shattered
lightshards titilating young leaves
eking out tunneled pathways
of giddy exuberance
from the darkness being
drawn into the dying orb ahead

Being retreating to its
greedy source
with a desperate flourish

I prayed for angels
against the setting of the sun
against the darkness
mingling groan with birdsong

Bursting then in windblown
tongues of yellow flame
from nightsunk underbrush
on either side windswirl of goldfinches
flared flitted dipped scooped
swiftly in fleeting arabesques
sweeping me up into their company
a sudden honor guard
flying me forward
throughward
painseared with joy

Below lost now in darkness
the liquid gossip of running water
spilling softly over stones

Harry der Nederlanden



Ephesus

The first Sunday home

the text from Ephesians
hit home harder
as we still carried with us
the setting where Paul spoke
"of bringing all things in heaven and on earth
together under one head, even Christ"
Bringing it to a people
required to give all their allegiance
to Rome.

To a people who once thought
Paul and Barnabas were the Greek gods
Zeus and Hermes.

The bus parked in front of the sale tents
where colourful silk shawls and scarves
spilled out beside ochre
and indigo woven carpets,
painted pottery,

Turkish Delight with hazelnut
and pistachio centers.

Then wound our way down the old thoroughfare.

So many years of history.

So many sandaled feet on this marble street
since the time of Paul.

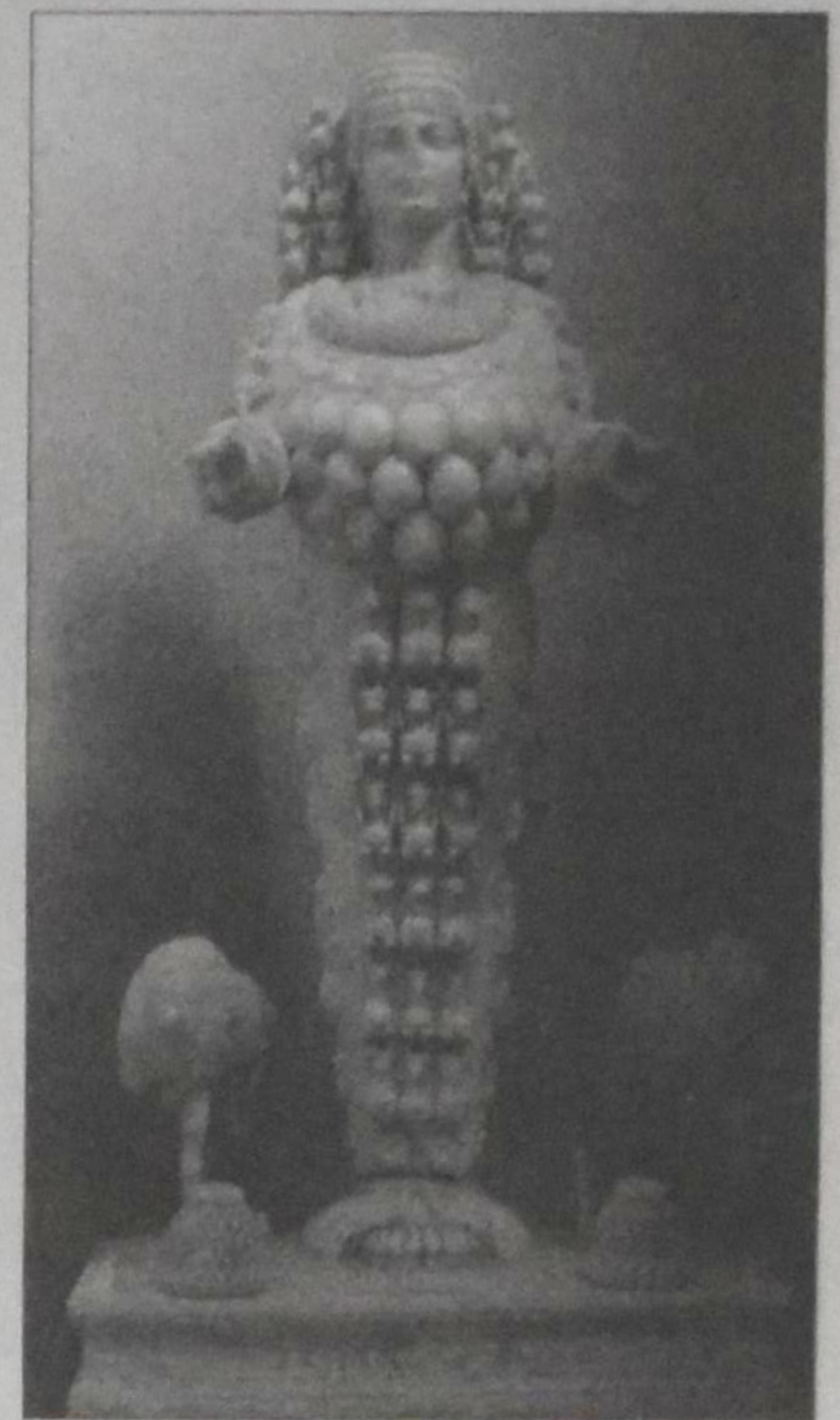
Even the feet of the silversmith Demetrius
who started a riot

when his business was affected by Paul's preaching
all on account of the goddess Artemis
also called Diana.

Still statues of her in museums.

These gods and goddesses
a backdrop in New Testament times

How far Paul stuck his neck out
in this society ruled by the Roman Empire,
daring to talk about a God
above the Roman ones,
and eventually becoming a martyr
for his faithful witness.



Statue of Artemis of the Ephesians

Linda Siebenga
(after a visit to Turkey)

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Ideas

French revolution: Rentable bikes every 900 feet

Beginning July 15, Parisians can get one with the swipe of a card — and the first half-hour is free.

Robert Marquand

Paris — The socialist mayor of Paris, Bertrand Delanoë, has seen the future and it's got two wheels, three speeds, an adjustable seat, indestructible tires, a basket, and a bell. It's 50 pounds of ecofriendly handlebars, comin' at ya.

The French are turning Paris into a bicycle zone, pretty much overnight. Even now, astride small alleys and behind boulangeries, paving stones are being ripped to fit 750 bicycle rent "stations."

On July 15, a day after the French Revolution anniversary, the city of lights will kick off a "vélorution" with 10,648 rentable bikes, or vélos. By January, some 1,400 rent stations and 20,600 bikes are scheduled to be in place. In Paris proper, one will never be more than 900 feet from a set of cheap wheels. At least theoretically.

Similar programs have been launched elsewhere with varying success. But Paris officials say their city is the first world capital to adopt

a major green biking initiative, and they are doing it in a way that may be too big to fail. The ambitious Paris project is titled Vélib' — word-play for bicycle freedom. Read: freedom from too many cars and carbon fumes.

"When I first got involved with Vélib', I was amazed at the number of stations, 750 to start with, and the enthusiasm of everyone for reducing auto traffic," says Jonathan Pierson, a Paris native who's part of a team of young Parisians hosting questions at Vélib' stations during the day.

Amsterdam, a city not unfamiliar with bikes, tried a similar experiment that floundered. But the French think they've conquered the kinks. A bike-rental program started in Lyon in 2005 is working.

One clincher for the Paris project: Vélib' isn't costing the city anything, and should be self-supporting. The program is financed by advertising behemoth JC Decaux — in exchange for 1,600 billboards around the city.

The concept is computerized and credit card driven. Each station has a large ATM-sized panel that gives instructions in French, German, English, and Chinese. Riders buy in for a day (1 rules), a week (5 rules), or a year (29 euro). The panel issues a card that can be swiped over a small locking pod to release the bike.

It is also a concept designed mainly for commuters, not tourists seeking a languid ride along the Seine. Riders have 30 minutes to get to their destination before any charge is made. After 30 minutes, the cost is 1 euro (\$1.36). The bike is 2 rules for 1.5 hours, and 4 euro for 2 hours. "We hope each bike is used 10 to 14 times a day," says Pierson, who notes that the stations are open 24/7.

A rider who arrives to find no locking pods available, checks in, and is given another free 15 minutes and directions to the closest space. Need to stop for a baguette? The bike has a lock.

Yet there's also some personal responsi-

bility tied up with bicycle freedom. To avoid problems found in Lyon — nearly half of its 1,000 bikes disappeared or were destroyed in the first year — initial membership in the Paris program puts a 150 euros hold on the credit card. People are charged for bikes that aren't returned, placing an emphasis on rider care and oversight. Should a bike not be returned, an alarm inside the bike will go off.

Today, Lyon's program seems to have lost its training wheels; it now has 4,000 bikes that get ridden 20,000 times a day, more than 40 percent of which are used by office workers.

Paris officials hope to register 200,000 rides a day. Perhaps one can amend Ezra Pound's famous 1913 modernist reflection on the Paris metro: "...faces in the crowd/petals on a wet black bough" to "pedals on a silver-grey vélo."

Not that Parisians won't have to adjust. The French are fond of the idea of civilization and the vision of a city suffused with bike commuters is a humanist heaven. The problem is that Paris streets are Darwinist by nature. The 19th-century avenues are host to 21st-century traffic. The bulk of movement is not by vélos, but by Jurassic Park-like veloceraptors — aggressive autos and packs of even more aggressive motorscooters that tunnel through and sweep around car lanes and backed-up traffic.

City fathers and mothers argue that Parisian drivers will simply start to adjust. Such is the faith.

In the past two years, Paris has created larger zones for bikes, buses, and taxis. But there's no history of bike helmet wearing. Paris commuters in the morning and evening aren't particularly patient, and bike stations only have one sign-up panel. Some Parisians question the vélo station courtesy levels late at night, when students and partygoers want to get home.

For all the Tour de France glam and a general rise in bicycle culture in France, Paris has not been a bike town. A rising tide of bikers, though, are notorious for riding on sidewalks, ignoring traffic signals, and biking the wrong way on all those one-way streets.

Ann-Marie Fouchet of the Geppeto Vélo bike shop on the Left Bank feels the program "is good as a way to establish biking in Paris." But she says that Parisians are not used to dealing with bikes on the road. Every Friday evening about 500 bikers join for a tour of the city, during which "cars aren't always courteous and bikers don't always know how to deal with them," Ms. Fouchet says.

Another niggling factor amid the revolutionary fervor: parking. Parisians may like the idea of bike heaven, but few want their already crowded parking spaces absconded. To the barricades!

Albert Asseraf, director of marketing at Decaux, says that the bike project is so broad that after July 15, 2007, Parisians will refer to "before Vélib', and after Vélib'."

Ok. Vive le vélo!
Robert Marquand is a staff writer for The Christian Science Monitor

Christian racism

I felt like I was physically struck one day when my Opa casually made a blatantly racist remark. He was a hard core "twicer" when it came to church attendance, but it seems he had not caught the full vision of Revelation, where every tribe and nation gathers before the throne of God.

I wonder: if I had been born a generation or two earlier, would I be what today we call a racist?

I've been to a few anti-racism training workshops as a requirement for my work with Home Missions. In the latest session, we were each given large photographs portraying horribly racist historical events and asked to gaze at them without talking. The photograph in my hand revealed a haunting lynching scene. Two shabbily dressed black men hung limply from ropes in a tree, their chins tucked into their chests. Beneath them stood dozens of white people milling about. These people, both men and women, looked like middle-class folk, with horn-rimmed glasses and flower dresses. Some had cameras.

As the silence lingered, the thought hit me: if I was born in that place and in that time, would I be in the crowd with my camera? Then another thought occurred: if I was born in that time and that place and had different skin, would I be in the tree?

Same prejudice, different face

I would resist the notion that we are morally superior to the previous generation. Racial prejudice is not confined to historical areas or particular people groups. There's a streak running through every human heart. But racism is not what it used to be. It has morphed, mutated, adding new configurations to some old tendencies and habits. For example, minorities are not banned from shopping malls, but they do wait longer on average for customer service. Another small example: an Asian friend worked his way up to PhD status, and although he is compliant and draws in more grant money than most, he is discriminated against by his department head and treated without even common respect.

Universities legislate diversity through numerous policies, and even encourage a language that is sensitive and inclusive. But can it cultivate *true virtue*, a heart that is open to all neighbours near and far away? Few universities claim moral character as a goal for education, but the politically correct climate still does force a definite substitute code or etiquette.

What about church? Does it intend diversity? Can it be a place where unconditional love for all is bred and abounding? I attend a white (mostly Dutch-Canadian) church, and we sing mostly American and British music. But if you think about it, we worship a Jewish Lord and read Greek scriptures that come from an ancient Roman context. We claim a French man who lived in Switzerland as a spiritual ancestor (John Calvin), who himself drank deeply from the writings of an African (St. Augustine). Our grey hymnal and *Sing the New Creation* includes music from Hispanic, Asian, European, and African American sources. In sum, church can be a multi-cultural feast, and we can see ourselves as immigrant guests graciously invited to the table.

From stew to salad

We have typically been given two images to work with when it comes to diversity: the American melting pot or the Canadian mosaic. My colleague at York University Shiao Chong suggests that both are unsatisfactory, the first because it erases all difference and the second because it separates all groups into their own little enclaves.

His alternative image is the salad bowl, where people can maintain their own distinct flavour but are jumbled up and covered with the same dressing. This is at least a good metaphor for church, where we come as particular ethnic persons, but are equal before God and equally filled with his Spirit.

That said, I've visited and preached in some rather unfriendly churches over the years. The salad has not been tossed yet and all the ingredients lie in divided clumps on a bed of lettuce. Human beings gravitate towards their own kind, and it seems church is no exception. We feel most comfortable in the inner circle. Like in the movie "Crash" we only meet each other when forced by an odd set of circumstances — or tragedy.

By grace, we have to intentionally work against our inclinations to a cold tribalism, and we have to deliberately build bridges across the gulfs that divide. I know someone who made sure when he moved to a new town that he found a dentist and a doctor who were from a different ethnic background. We all have to start somewhere.

Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed Education Mission Leader and resides in Guelph, Ontario.



Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman



News/Stewardship



Newly trained Afghan police

Afghan ... continued from page 2

In the span of one week earlier this month, a Taliban ambush in southern Zabul Province left 16 officers dead; a district police chief in eastern Paktika Province was killed when a roadside bomb exploded his vehicle; and militants attacked another officer's house in southern Ghazni Province and killed five members of his family, indicating the threat to relatives or those who cooperate with the police. Many officers have reported finding it difficult to return to their home villages because their police work has marked them as government sympathizers.

"Police working in remote places are in trouble. The ones here cannot feed their family or help themselves either," Hussein says, noting that the paltry \$70 monthly wage policemen are supposed to earn is often \$10 less once it passes through the bureaucracy. "A bag of flour costs nearly [\$35]. How can we solve any problem with this?"

Such dire circumstances have the inevitable backlash of fueling drug-related corruption and predatory tendencies among police forces. The World Bank says low-paying police chief posts are bought and sold in bidding wars that allow the holder to tax poppy farmers and drug traffickers. In these situations, farmers who can't afford to pay bribes must often see their crops destroyed.

To compensate, some provinces have seen the formation of traditional tribal policing systems. The Ghazni provincial police chief, for example, has said he could summon at least 500 militiamen to combat insurgents if needed; similar claims have been made by community leaders in other troubled provinces.

The government is also establishing a 5,000-man reserve force known as the Afghan National Civil Order Police. It will be deployed to central provinces where it can provide "quick-response support wherever regular police are attacked," says Bashary, adding that the first 300 recruits have arrived in Kabul for the final phase of training. "They will go in and pound the enemy, and

then withdraw."

Adding to that, the European Union has taken over police training duties from Germany, dispatching 60 advisers to restive districts to improve capabilities, with another 100 on their way. More are expected to arrive as the Afghan government seeks to boost police forces by 20,000 men from the current level of about 62,000 over the next couple of years, the spokesman said.

The United States, for its part, is providing armored vehicles resistant to mines and attacks from improvised explosive devices, and Afghan officials are optimistic that a large slice of the \$8 billion security package Congress approved earlier this year will be spent on police reform.

"All of the international community now understands that the police are the main factor for security and stability in the provinces," says Bashary. "They are directly engaged on the front lines ... and should at least be paid equal to the Army, since they are doing very much more."

Maj. Gen. Robert Durbin, head of the Combined Security Transition Command, which is tasked with carrying out police reform, says he expects salaries to be raised to Army level within a month. To address internal problems, police have also set up their own system for investigating corruption in the ranks, including a toll-free number installed three months ago that has reportedly received dozens of complaint calls on matters ranging from pay distribution to mistreatment at the hands of superiors.

So in the meantime, what are the incentives to wear a uniform?

"We love our country and are working almost without salary," says Ahmed Haidari, a soon-to-be graduate from the Kabul Police Academy. "Our country has known war for many years, and we will not back down now from the Taliban."

But, he adds, "If I get married, I might have to find a different job. Women and children are expensive."

Stewardship basics 1

"...I am not my own but belong body and soul, in life and in death to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ..."

That's how the answer begins to the first question posed in the Heidelberg Catechism. And for so many who have memorized this answer and even for those who have not – this is such a comfort to know. It is also a great way to define the first lesson of stewardship – it's all God's. All that we are, all that we have and ever hope to be – is God's.

That's both a comfort for those who believe and a source of condemnation for those who do not belong.

There's a story of a successful farmer, a story that Jesus told which is recorded in the Bible (Luke 12:16-21). One year this farmer had such an abundant harvest that his barns couldn't contain the harvest. The harvest was huge, so that he decided to tear the old barns down and build bigger ones. With the bigger barns he would have plenty of room to store all his crops and his possessions. And then, he thought, now that I have got it safe and have my barns full, let me take life easy and eat and drink and be merry!

But he forgot stewardship lesson #1: that all he has is really God's. After all it was God who provided the bountiful harvest and allowed him to have all the abundance. And God was even ready to entrust him with more, but he did not remember whose it was in the first place. And because he didn't acknowledge God's provision and God's intention, the story continues, God calls an end to his life and advances the day of his reckoning.

As I consider the story and apply this stewardship basic to my own life, I see much that I don't like to see reflected in this story. I do believe I belong, but so often I act like I'm the owner and forget that I am only a steward. It compromises my belonging when I get distracted with my belongings!

What would happen if there were another outcome to the story that Jesus told. What if instead, this successful farmer said: "Wow – what a harvest! Thanks be to God! I have so much to share. Here's what I'll do: I'll take what I need to take care of my livestock – but the rest that I don't need I'll give away. I'll save adequate provision to meet my family's need however, the abundance that remains may bless others!"

Do you think with such a giving attitude, one that acknowledges that it's all God's, that God would have called this steward home prematurely?

In times of affluence when

Reflections on Stewardship

Rick De Graaf

things were going so well Old Testament Israel repeatedly forgot who they were. They got distracted and started worshipping created things rather than the Creator who had called them out from the nations to be a special people by whom all nations would be blessed. A people from whom came the Messiah!

In times of affluence when things are going so well we, who belong and are called to be children of God through Jesus Christ, also get distracted and exhibit the same mindset of dependence on created things and independence from the creator. I don't think we are any different today. It's a reminder for all of us to remember to acknowledge that our wealth is not our own but belongs to God. We are accountable to him for the stewardship of it (however little or much). God entrusts it to us to be a source of blessing. We are to have the same grip on it as Job:

"...Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."
Job 1:21

Stewardly tip: A gift of time: Time is difficult for us to give, especially quality time, however, God is waiting expectantly. To be of good quality (first fruits quality), it means finding a quiet spot. It means tuning out all distraction and just to be still and to quiet our minds and hearts so that God may enter in. In the silence without any distraction – to be like Elijah listening for a gentle whisper from God (1 Kings 19: 12).

Readers: Share your Stewardly Tips so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestions (by mail to *Christian Courier* or by email to my address below) and provide your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask you for more details.

Next issue: Stewardship basics 2

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Church

Egyptian court rules in favour of Copts charged with apostasy

Elizabeth Kendal

In April 2007 a lower court ruled against 45 Copts who had converted to Islam or been deemed Muslim on account of the conversion of a parent, but who wanted to officially return to Christianity. The lower court ruled that Muslims, even if they are converts from Christianity, could not be permitted to apostasize (leave Islam). The Copts decided to appeal.

On July 1, despite the government's efforts to get the case dismissed, Judge Essam Abdel Aziz of Egypt's Supreme Administrative Court ruled in favour of the Copts and agreed to consider the merits of their case. The appeal was successful and a retrial has been

slated for September 1, 2007. According to Middle East On-line, human rights groups welcomed the decision. "The decision by the Supreme Administrative Court to consider the case of Egyptian converts to Islam wanting to return to their Church is very positive," said Ramsis al-Naggar, the Coptic lawyer who represented 12 of the plaintiffs. "It proves there is still a window of freedom in Egypt."

"It is a step in the right direction," Hossam Bahgat, director of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights said. "We are hopeful and optimistic that the Supreme Administrative Court will eventually uphold the principles of religious freedom and nondiscrimination,

both of which are guaranteed under the Constitution and international law."

Associated Press reports, "Court officials said government lawyers objected to Judge Essam Eddin Abdel-Aziz's decision to accept the appeal, arguing the initial verdict issued in April was in line with the principles of Islamic Sharia law."

So let the apostasy/liberty debate begin.

Elizabeth Kendal is the Principal Researcher and Writer for the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission (WEA RLC) www.worldevangelical.org/rlc.html. This article was initially written for the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty News & Analysis mailing list.

Church groups denounce Rushdie knighthood

By Anto Akkara

Bangalore, India (ENI) – Church groups in Pakistan and India have condemned Britain's decision to honour the author Salman Rushdie with a knighthood, and claimed it risks inflaming hatred against Christians in their countries.

"The British government should have been more sensitive to the feelings of the Muslims. This is a very bad decision," said Victor Azariah, general secretary of the National Council of Churches in Pakistan, which groups four Protestant churches, on June 28.

"Such insensitive decisions will only worsen the anti-Christian feelings in the Muslim world," Azariah told Ecumenical News International from his office in Lahore.

Indian-born Rushdie angered Muslims in many part of the world

with his 1988 novel, *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie was accused of insulting Islam, and had to go into hiding after Iran's late spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, issued a religious edict, or fatwa, declaring a death sentence against the author.

Since the award was announced in mid-June, Muslims have demonstrated in, among other places, London, Pakistan and Iran. The Pakistan parliament unanimously agreed a resolution condemning the knighthood and demanding its withdrawal.

Azariah said that "indiscreet" actions such as the award of the knighthood could become a propaganda tool in the hands of fundamentalist forces to demonise Pakistan's minority Christian community. He also pointed out that actions such

as the publication of cartoons in a Danish newspaper caricaturing the Prophet Muhammad, or the US-led invasion of Afghanistan had been used to portray Christians as being anti-Muslim.

More than 30 Christians have been shot and killed in Pakistan following the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan to oust the Taliban regime then in control.

Meanwhile, in India, the country's National Council of Churches has also criticized the knighthood, and said that Britain should have exercised "restraint" in honouring Rushdie. The council's general secretary, Bishop D. K. Sahu, said, "This is not a simple question of honouring an author. The whole world knows the anger in the Muslim world against his book."

Scotland's religious leaders condemn airport attack

By Trevor Grundy

Edinburgh (ENI) – Leaders of several religious communities in Scotland have condemned a recent terror attack on Glasgow airport, as well as two foiled terror attacks in London, and have urged the public not to lay blame for the incidents on race or religious beliefs.

"As religious leaders, we affirm our view that any act of terrorism carried out in the name of religion is a gross perversion of the purpose of faith, and is not supported by either the tenets of any of the faiths in Scotland nor by the vast majority of the followers of each faith," said Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Baha'i leaders in a July 3 statement.

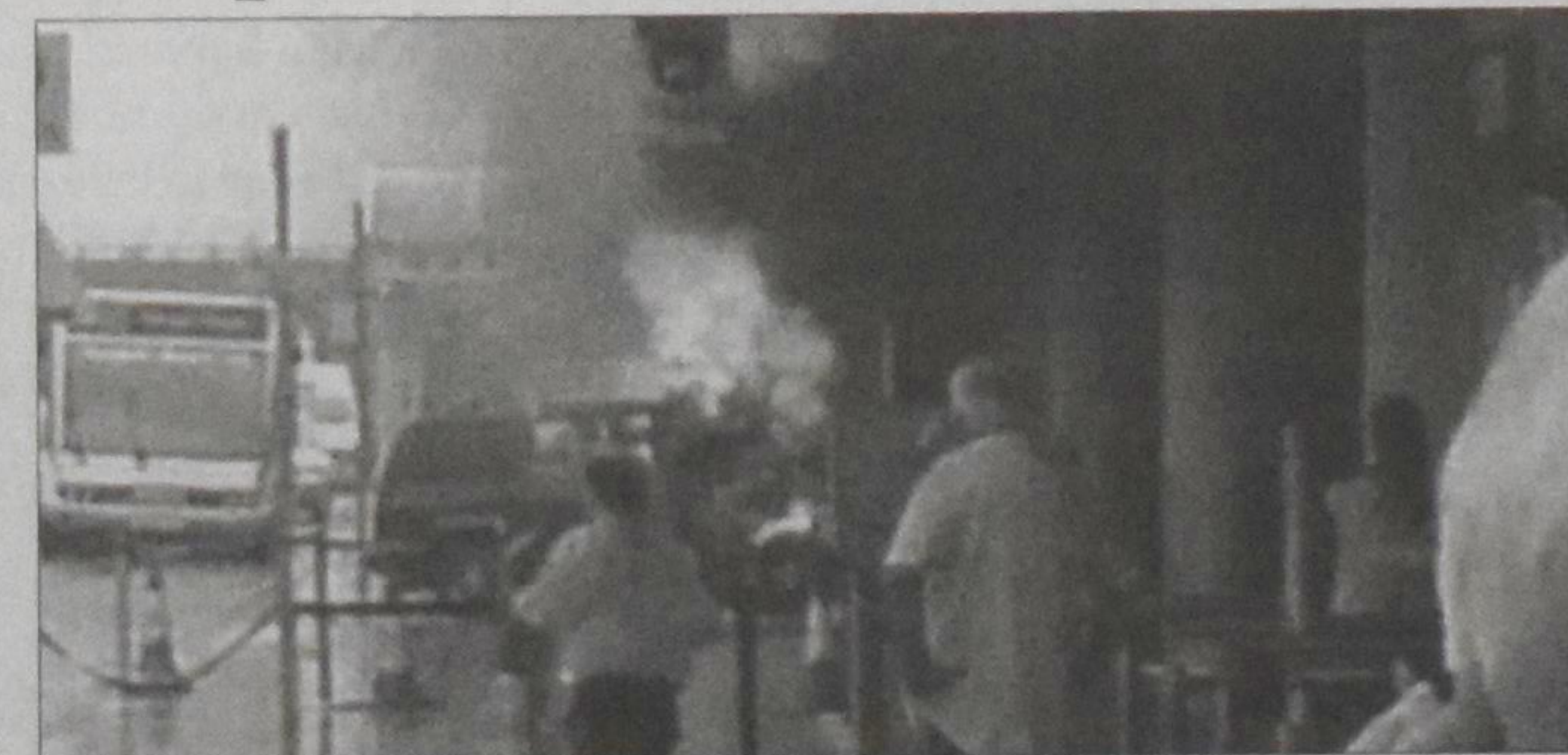
A vehicle loaded with petrol cylinders smashed into the entrance

hall of Glasgow airport on June 30. Police took two men, said by witnesses to be of Asian appearance, into custody after the attack.

Authorities said hundreds of people could have been killed if the vehicle's contents had exploded as planned. The day before, police discovered two cars containing petrol, gas cylinders and nails in central London.

The moderator of the Church of Scotland, the Rev. Sheilagh Kesting, commented, "It is so important that as leaders of the different faiths we are able to stand together in the face of such atrocities, and to condemn utterly any backlash there might be on the Asian community in our country."

Scotland's Roman Catholic



leader, Cardinal Keith O'Brien, said, "Nothing must be allowed to destroy that friendship or the mutual respect we have for each other, even in times of crisis."

In London, the Muslim Council of Britain, in a statement made jointly with an inter-faith group,

New book analyzes 'Alpha' phenomenon

By Martin Revis

London (ENI) – Advertisements on the backs of buses, in taxis, on billboards and in newspapers for "Alpha courses", a popular introduction to the essentials of Christianity, are familiar to many people in Britain and further afield.

Alpha's organizers claim that more than 8 million people worldwide have now attended one of their courses, and that more than 7,000 churches in Britain and Ireland, and more than 30,000 around the world, have been signed up to run Alpha courses.

But according to Andrew Brookes, editor of *The Alpha Phenomenon*, a new book about the introductory course on Christianity, few churches see sustained growth as a result of Alpha alone.

"Most Alpha churches only run the course five and a half times, and not enough to get serious outreach. I think this is an area which needs much more attention," Brookes told Ecumenical News International.

The Alpha course was devised 30 years ago by the Rev. Charles Marnham, then an Anglican curate at Holy Trinity Church in London's Brompton Road. The course ran for four weeks and was for people who wanted to know more about Christianity.

Alpha now takes the form of a series of talks addressing key issues related to the Christian faith; each session begins with a meal and the course ends with a special celebration supper.

Brookes puts conversion rates of those attending Alpha at between 15 and 25 percent, although this depends upon how conversion to Christianity is defined. Only about 10 percent of those participating have had no experience of church at some point in their lives.

"The course in itself is not sufficient to sustain outreach, which requires a raft of other strategies to produce sustained growth," says Brookes. These include greater lay participation through the development of what he calls pastorates, or groups of up to 30 people who meet once every two weeks for study and prayer, and to share a meal together.

As a sign of the interest in the course, Brookes points to the Alpha International Campus, now being built in West London at a cost of several million pounds, as the latest evolution of the educational initiative.

The campus, due to be completed within two years, will offer training and resources to the worldwide Christian community, and these will include expertise in broadcasting and communication skills. A worship centre will seat 1,400 people.

Yet Alpha is often seen as controversial. Critics say it offers a comfortable, individualistic version of the Christian faith, and particularly attracts affluent and professional young people.

Brookes' new book, with contributions by 15 theological and mission experts, seeks to analyze the Alpha phenomenon, to question assumptions made about the study course, and to provide pastoral suggestions to those interested in Christian mission.

of the public in the West End of London and thereby spread fear and havoc," the Muslim council said in its joint statement with the Three Faiths Forum, which promotes dialogue between Muslims, Christians and Jews.

The Scottish religious leaders said in their statement, "We hope that all of the people of Scotland will respond to this attack by reaching out and strengthening further the bonds of friendship which tie our communities together into one Scottish community, and thus demonstrate the futility of violence."

The Glasgow attack was the first major security incident in Scotland since the bombing of a passenger plane over Lockerbie in December 1988.

condemned all forms of terrorism, and urged anyone with information about the incidents to contact the police.

"We denounce the barbarism of those who have been involved in the appalling operation in Glasgow Airport and the abortive plan to murder indiscriminately members

Church

Minority faiths in Malaysia criticize 'misuse' of religion

By Michele Green

Singapore (ENI) – Members of five minority religious groups in Malaysia, including Christians and Hindus, have urged their government to take steps to prevent "personal tragedies" resulting from state policies that favour Islam, the official religion of this south-east Asian nation.

In a document that describes the effects of a policy in which Muslims are prevented from converting to other religions, the minority religious groups say that some people are even sent to "rehabilitation camps where they are held and 're-educated' until they lose their desire to convert out of Islam."

The claims were included in a "Note of Protest" issued on June 19 by the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism.

"The Note of Protest highlights the personal tragedies of various ordinary Malaysians suffering anguish as a result, in one way or another, of the misuse of religion [such as] persons who are treated as 'Muslims' against their will," the consultative council said in a statement.

The protest followed a high-profile court case of a Muslim woman who converted to Christianity and sought to have her conversion recognized by the state so she could marry her Christian fiancé. Inter-religious marriages are banned in Malaysia.

The woman's appeal was rejected by the country's highest court which ordered her to seek redress in an Islamic court even though Islamic courts can send apostates to prison for abandoning Islam.

The consultative council cited numerous other cases, including that of a Hindu woman

who lost custody of her child because her husband converted to Islam, and of an ethnic Indian woman sent to a re-education camp because she wanted to become a Hindu.

Malaysia is considered one of the world's most relaxed Muslim countries but the treatment of apostates has ignited a heated debate.

Half of Malaysia's 26 million people are ethnic Malays, who must by law be Muslim, while the country's Chinese and Indian minorities include Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs. Local officials in each of Malaysia's 13 federal states selectively enforce Islamic law.

The grouping of religious minorities urged the government to allow freedom of religion to all people living in the country, and said it "prayed for a peaceful and just society which would find unity in diversity."

Polish church backs trade unions over Sunday working hours

By Jonathan Luxmoore

Warsaw, (ENI) – Trade unionists in Poland have won support from Roman Catholic leaders in Poland after beginning a series of go-slows in support of demands for the right not to work on Sundays at supermarkets belonging to the British retail chain, Tesco.

The Solidarity trade union announced the action on the June 7 Corpus Christi public holiday, after urging Tesco, which employs 25,000 people at 280 supermarkets and 21 petrol stations in Poland, to take local customs into consideration when setting working hours.

Support for the union has come from Catholic Archbishop Stanislaw Gadecki of Poznan.

"Refraining from Sunday work isn't only a religious duty, it's also a basic human right," Gadecki said in early June. "Working

on Sundays and feast days is banned in most countries of the old European Union. Yet attempts to introduce such a law in Poland are usually undermined by those who take the day off themselves but deny this right to others."

He added, "Freedom to rest is essential for a person because of his human dignity, as well as his religious, family, cultural and social needs. The absence of a ban on Sunday trading, and the forcing of work by many employers, is leading to a serious conflict of conscience for faithful people."

However, a British-based spokesperson for Tesco, Monika Kosinska, said that all the company's employees had a right to choose their working hours.

"Tesco is a very inclusive company but it is hard for us to answer on behalf of the Polish branch," Kosinska told Ecumenical News

International on June 25. "Having studied human rights, I am not aware that there is any right not to work on Sundays. But I wouldn't imagine Tesco would force anyone to work on any day of the week," she said.

A Roman Catholic priest from Gorzow, the Rev. Zbigniew Samociak, said his own cathedral was now overshadowed by an adjoining Tesco superstore that was open for 17 hours every day. He said the British firm routinely prevented Catholic employees from attending church services and showed "no respect" for Polish religious occasions.

Church leaders have previously called for tighter controls on Poland's mostly foreign-owned hypermarkets. However, a 2001 Labour Code amendment which would have forced them to close on Sundays was rejected after claims that the move would have caused 16,000 job losses.

Respect and don't judge prostitutes, says Vatican

By Luigi Sandri

Rome, (ENI) – The Vatican has called for an attitude of respect, understanding, compassion, and abstaining from judgement – "in the right sense" – towards women who have become caught up in prostitution, which the Holy See described as a form of modern slavery.

"Many prostitutes in the so-called developed world come from poor countries, and in Europe, as elsewhere, many have fallen victim to people traffickers to meet a growing demand from sex 'consumers'," stated Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino in a document – "Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of the Road" – issued by the Vatican on 19 June.

"It should also be taken into account that, in many cases, the women involved in prostitution have experienced violence and sexual abuse since childhood," said Martino, who is the president of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, which is the body behind the document.

In Rome, as in other big cities, prostitution takes place openly in certain sections of the city; the women involved reportedly come from Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa, especially Nigeria.

The pontifical council now says Christian communities should be encouraged to work with national and local authorities "to help street women find alternative means of making a living". It added that religious congregations, especially female ones, should seek "new ways of bearing witness to the dignity of women."

At the same time, the council noted that the Church could provide a wide variety of services to the victims of prostitution. These could include housing, medical and legal assistance, education, protection from threats, and help with obtaining visas if it is not possible for the women involved to return to their country of origin.

"It is also necessary to promote respect,

understanding, compassion and an attitude of abstaining from judging – in the right sense – women who have fallen into the network of prostitution," the council's document stated.

At the same time, the Vatican said attention needed to be given to the clients of prostitutes.

"The 'customers' need help in solving their most intimate problems and in finding suitable ways of directing their sexual tendencies," the document explained. It continued, "Buying sex' does not resolve the problems that arise primarily from frustration and lack of authentic relationships, and from the loneliness that characterizes so many life situations today."

The Vatican also suggested using the criminal law to punish clients, and noted, "An effective measure towards cultural change with respect to prostitution could derive from associating criminal law with social condemnation."

Christian grouping appeals for AU intervention in Zimbabwe

Takesure Matarise

Harare (ENI) – An alliance of southern African Christian organizations has called for the African Union and other key groupings on the continent to intervene to stop human rights violations allegedly being perpetrated on Zimbabweans by the country's government.

"We note with sadness that, since 2000, Zimbabweans have suffered gross human rights abuses," the alliance, known as the Regional Faith-Based Joint Initiative, said in a July 5 statement. It added, "We appeal to the Southern Africa Development Community, African Union and Pan-African Parliament to hear the urgent plea and cry of the suffering Zimbabwean people and to act accordingly and urgently."

In 2000 and 2005, President Robert Mugabe's ruling Zanu-PF party won general elections in which it registered huge losses in urban areas. Human rights organizations have since alleged widespread reprisals against urban dwellers.

The alliance is made up of the Inter-Regional Meeting of Bishops in Southern Africa, the Association of Evangelicals in Africa – Ethics, Peace and Justice Commission, and the Ecumenical Documentation and Information Centre in Southern Africa. The alliance says it is working to promote solutions to the deteriorating socio-economic and political situation in Zimbabwe.

"We urge the Zimbabwean government to ensure that the people of Zimbabwe have access to their basic rights of food, water, housing and education," the alliance said in its statement.

More than 80 percent of Zimbabwe's 13 million people are unemployed, and the annual inflation rate is currently estimated at 10,000 percent and rising.

"Life expectancy has moved from 55 years to about 34 years over more than 20 years of misrule," the alliance stated. "The health delivery system has totally collapsed. It is also disheartening to note that Zimbabwe has moved from being the regional bread basket to the region's foremost beggar," the group added.

A United Nations special envoy sent to Zimbabwe in 2005 estimated that more than 700,000 urban dwellers were left homeless in a government campaign called "Operation Murambatsvina", which means "Operation Drive Out Trash" in Shona, the language spoken by the majority of Zimbabweans.

The government said the operation was a slum-clearance exercise intended to rid Zimbabwe of criminal elements. Opposition politicians, however, described it as retribution against the urban population for not supporting Zanu-PF in parliamentary elections.

Love

Love in the blood and bones



Linda with Jennifer

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Ten years ago Linda Kraay, 50, responded to a specific appeal by the Canadian Blood Services to citizens of her hometown, Lacombe, Alberta, to have their blood tested and registered with the Unrelated Bone Marrow Donor Registry. The lives of two community children depended on finding a match. Though she was not called upon to donate her bone marrow at that time, her name has been registered since then.

In January 2006, Kraay, a member of Woodynook Christian Reformed Church in Lacombe, received a call from the Canadian Blood Services, informing her that she might be a possible match for someone. She agreed to go for further testing. In a recent e-mail interview, Kraay, who along with her husband Ed runs an agri-tourism business, Lacombe Corn Maze, explained the bone marrow extraction and transplant process, told about her June 9 meeting with 22-year-old Jennifer Rogers – the Hamilton, Ontario, single mom whose life was saved because of the transplant – and explained her motivation for donating her bone marrow.

What procedures did you undergo to be eligible to donate your bone marrow?

I went for testing, called confirmatory typing, at my local hospital, where ten vials of blood were taken out of me. Bone marrow matches are determined by testing for antigens, or protein markers, that are located on the surface of white blood cells. A complete match means that six-out-of-six antigens are the same. I was a six-out-of-six antigen match for a patient in need of a bone marrow transplant. Some of my blood was used to further analyze those six antigens by using DNA technology.

Most of my blood was flown to the hospital where the prospective recipient was being treated. There the hospital lab performed

DNA testing on my blood, which took about two weeks. Then I started a work-up process which included a detailed interview with the Unrelated Bone Marrow Donor Registry's case manager, who co-ordinates the entire process between the donor and the recipient. At the Tom Bakker Cancer Hospital in Calgary, I underwent a thorough health examination and further blood work to determine whether I was healthy.

How was your bone marrow extracted? What happened immediately afterward? Did you need much time to recuperate?

Bone marrow collection is a surgical procedure performed under anaesthetic.

At 11:00 a.m. on March 15, 2006, the physician inserted a large, hollow needle into the cavity of my rear hipbone (just above the buttocks) where a large quantity of bone marrow is located. It was drawn into a syringe until the necessary amount was collected, four cups in about ninety minutes. Someone from the recipient's hospital was waiting outside the operating room door ready to take the bone marrow and catch a flight to the city in which the recipient's hospital was located.

The recipient started receiving the bone marrow, like a blood transfusion, at 11:30 p.m. Later, I was stiff and sore in my lower back where the bone marrow was extracted. I experienced muscle pain and fatigue for about ten days.

When were you informed that Jennifer Rogers wanted to contact you, and what was your reaction?

I knew that a year after the completion of a transplant the recipient and his/her center could request information about the donor and pursue making contact. Immediately after the year was up, I received a letter from Canadian Blood Services stating that my

recipient wanted to contact me. They stated all the pros and cons of making contact and sent a permission sheet. After thinking about it for several days, I agreed to do it.

A week later, I learned that 22-year-old Jennifer Rogers from Hamilton, Ontario had received my bone marrow. The day after Mothers Day, I received a beautiful card from Jennifer in which I learned that she has a two-year-old daughter, Acadia. She wrote, "There are no words deep enough to tell you how much I appreciate what you've done. Thank you! You saved my life and gave my daughter her mom back."

Soon after, I was contacted by the Canadian Blood Services in Hamilton, asking if I would consider coming to Ontario to meet Jennifer. They planned to hold a media event on June 14 at Niagara Falls for Blood Donor Week and World Blood Donor Day. Jennifer had been selected to speak at the event because of this year's theme, "Safe Blood for Safe Motherhood." Of course, I agreed to come.

What was it like to meet Jennifer and to be involved in the Canadian Blood Services' media event?

As I reflect on the incredible opportunity that I had to meet the recipient of my bone marrow, I'm overwhelmed with awe and humility at how God knows the whole picture. Jennifer and her mother met my daughter and me at the Hamilton airport with a bouquet of flowers and hugs and tears. It was amazing to meet someone, knowing that they have your bone marrow inside of them, and that, because of it, they are alive.

Jennifer told us about her experiences over the last two years – being repeatedly admitted to the hospital, fighting numerous infections, waiting for a match, going through chemotherapy, going through the transplant, waiting for it to engraft, and much more. I



was amazed at how positive she was and how she took one day at a time.

Participating in the media event at Niagara Falls was really neat! I think that everyone, if they are able to, should donate blood and register with the Unrelated Bone Marrow Donor Registry because you never know when you or yours might need a transplant. As the Canadian Blood Services slogan says, "It's in You to Give."

What role did your love for God play in your motivation to donate your bone marrow?

I often wondered why I was chosen to give bone marrow. Why me, of all people? God said to me, "Why not you? I sent Jesus for you. Now I'm sending you to Jennifer and her family." Now, knowing the whole picture – but still not really knowing the entire picture – I can rest in God's incredible love for me. Because that love is in me to give, how can I not go and love complete strangers? It's amazing that I've been able to meet new people and now call them friends. My prayer for Jennifer is that she will meet Jesus as her personal Savior, and that we will be friends forever.

On June 14, at the Canadian Blood Services' media event in Niagara Falls, Ontario, Jennifer Rogers, spoke about her experience as the recipient of Linda Kraay's bone marrow, and how it saved her life. Here is an excerpt from her speech.

How can you possibly thank someone for saving your life? As difficult as it is, I'm going to attempt to show you just how much it meant to me. My life was very normal. I had a baby and I was studying full-time at Niagara College. So, when I was feeling tired, I didn't think anything of it.

The bruises that started to appear on my body were small, so I assumed I had bumped into something and then forgotten about it. When I was advised to go to the Emergency Department to have a bruise checked, I was skeptical. I thought that I could ignore it.

Within the next seven days, I was given a stack of papers about Aplastic Anemia, a life-threatening disease that meant my bone marrow stopped producing blood. I had three bone marrow biopsies and was transferred to McMaster Hospital in Hamilton. My life was tossed upside down. I went to meetings with doctors to discuss options, and to find out just how serious Aplastic Anemia was.

I tried a round of drug therapy, which didn't work. Because the drug therapy didn't work, I had to drop out of school and concentrate on my health. That's when I had to look at getting a bone marrow transplant.

Memories

A cherry tale

The best outcome I could hope for was that one of my siblings would be a perfect match.

Unfortunately, neither were matches. If one had been a match, I would have had a 90 percent chance of surviving. My chances were then reduced to a 50 percent chance of surviving an unrelated bone marrow transplant.

While I waited for a match to be found, I received more than fifty blood transfusions and platelets. I was in and out of the hospital, going up to four times a week, just so that I could keep fighting until a match could be found. I was told I would probably have two years to live if I didn't get the transplant.

I remember when my doctor told me that they had three possible matches. The final tests would prove which one was the best match for me. The news sent shivers down my back, and still does. It was a new burst of hope.

While all the final testing was going on, I was making some of the hardest decisions of my life. I had to make a will and prepare for the worst. Through it all, I managed to keep my head up. I had to stay positive for my family and friends, but most of all for me. I had the will to live, and I was ready for a battle.

My transplant was booked for March 15, but by the time the bone marrow arrived it was 11:30 p.m. I received all the drugs that I needed, and the nurse started the transplant at midnight.

April 21 was a milestone. In my room was a calendar. Everyone chose a date and wrote their names in that square, guessing which day my new bone marrow would engraft. Engrafting meant that my body had accepted the new bone marrow. By no means was I cured or in the clear, but I was one step closer.

I'll never forget the day I went home. I didn't sleep a wink the night before because I was so excited. I saw my daughter again for the first time in five weeks. When I was admitted, she was walking, but the day she came to the hospital to get me she ran down the hall to me.

I will forever be thankful to my bone marrow donor for giving me the gift of life. I am thankful for everyone who donated the blood and platelets that I received, and for all of you who have donated blood.

Once upon a time, in a land where gasoline was sold by the gallon and 25 cents would buy you a Coke and a bag of chips, I stood on a street corner in the early morning mist with a half dozen other kids, waiting to make my fortune.

It wasn't always easy being "Jimmy's kid sister." The math teacher expected impossibly high marks. The track and field coach was disappointed when I didn't set records in shot-put or javelin. And my parents wondered how their daughter could be so difficult when their son had been such a pleasant child. (I maintain he was every bit as rebellious as I was. He just argued less about it.) But now and then, it was a real advantage to ride big brother's coat tails. This was one of those days.

I was 12 years old and wanted desperately to pick cherries at

Connelly's fruit farm. The problem was that they wouldn't take anyone under 13. Except me. Because, after all, my brother was the legendary Jim B — a lean, mean, fruit-picking machine. Jim, eight years my senior, had paved the way for me by working at Connelly's for several summers. On his worst day he came home with more than \$10. That was substantial cash, especially considering the pay was 35 cents for every six quart basket of cherries picked.

So there I stood on that sultry July morning, feeling intimidated but important amidst the older kids. Finally the shiny red Mercury came barreling down Station Street. The pick-up truck was old, but

in mint condition. The same could be said for its driver, Grandma Connelly. We piled into the tarp-covered box of the truck and the adventure began. A slim little lady with wispy white hair, Grandma Connelly had the reputation of driving like Jehu. It became clear within the first mile that she earned that name fair and square. She had only one rule: stay seated at all times. Later she added a second: no throwing food out of the truck. That was after an irate motorist pulled us over one day, complaining about the slice of bologna stuck to his windshield.

Before long I realized that I wasn't the worker my brother was. Sometimes I didn't even cash in my pay tickets, embarrassed to admit how little picking I had done. Instead, I collected them for a couple of days so that I had more to turn in at once. But I was having a great time. The orchard was managed by the Connelly's son, Ross. His hair was graying, but he had a youthful face and a ready smile. He never pushed us hard, although he did assign us to the older, taller trees, and he made sure we picked all the fruit before allowing us to move to the next one. From some of the higher limbs you could see beyond the Niagara escarpment, where Lake Ontario stretched across the horizon.

My favorite part of the day was lunchtime, when we would sprawl out on the lawn under the big maples in the front yard. Someone always had a transistor radio. We listened to Beatles and Beach Boys while sipping Kool Aid from our thermoses and telling goofy jokes.

The first few days I ate as many cherries as I dropped into my basket. (Fortunately there were outhouses strategically located around the farm.) We often amused ourselves with pit-spitting contests, or by throwing the soft, overripe cherries at each other. Of course we had to be on the lookout for Mr. Connelly Sr. Nobody would have dared

to call him Grandpa. A wiry old specter, he seemed to move silently through the orchards, keeping a wary eye on his estate. We even had a special whistle to let each other know that Mr. C was on the prowl.

One day we were working in the shorter trees and a fruit fight broke out. If anybody gave the secret signal, I missed it. I ducked to avoid a fat, juicy Bing headed straight for my face and slipped off the branch I was on, crashing onto a pile of empty baskets at the base of the tree. I was still laughing as I picked myself up, until I came eye to eye with Mr. Connelly. He stood there, hands on his hips, serious expression on his wizened face. "Those baskets cost us 5 cents apiece," he said. I picked up four or five broken ones and handed them over. "Sorry," I said. He shook his head and walked away.

Things were pretty quiet for the rest of the morning. Ross came out to pick up the full baskets just before noon. "Heidi, Grandma wants to see you at the barn after lunch," he said. I gulped.

I don't think I tasted much of my sandwich that day. I focused on the humiliation of being fired from my first job. The shame. And me — Jim B's sister. How could I explain this to my parents? I certainly couldn't blame the Connellys for letting me go.

Grandma Connelly smiled warmly when I reported to the barn. Cherry stains spotted her floral smock and her knee-high support hose were neatly rolled around her ankles, just sticking out of the orthopedic shoes. "I need some help sorting," she said, "And I thought this would give us a chance to get to know each other."

I waited all afternoon for conversation to turn toward my poor behavior, expecting at least a scolding, if not dismissal. Grandma talked about anything and everything else. She told me stories of her younger days, asked me questions about myself and talked about my big brother, "The best worker we've ever had," she said. I felt my cheeks flush.

When five o'clock came, to my astonishment she pressed a \$5.00 bill into my hand and said, "Tomorrow you'll be picking in the morning and then you can help me again after lunch." All the way home I kept thinking, I can't believe they're letting me come back tomorrow!

From that day forward I was a changed woman. Reformed, you might say. I could never measure up to my brother's performance, but I improved as much as I possibly could. I still occasionally tossed cherries and spit pits, but in between I gave my best effort to the work at hand.

Was Grandma Connelly a Christian?

I honestly don't know. It wouldn't surprise me if she was, but

she never actually mentioned Jesus. Still, her generous forgiveness left a mark on my life as indelible as black cherry juice on a white cotton tee-shirt. She taught me about sin, salvation and thankfulness long before I could fully grasp their significance. I'm convinced God orchestrated this unique catechism session especially for me.

Here ends my cherry tale, except to say that I remain grateful for a God of second chances — the One who makes it possible for his children to live happily ever after.

Intangible Things

Heidi VanderSlikke



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Nature

An Ordinary Day, Please

Flowers & Thistles

Curt Gesch



Do these activities sound childish? At 58, I enjoy them. Too ordinary? You need excitement?

My answer to these objections is twofold:

1) It's pretty exciting in Iraq, Darfur, and Afghanistan;

2) Zechariah 8:4-5: "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there.'"

(And if you don't know of a place where you can do these things, call me up. I've got lots of acres and many mosquitoes to feed, not to mention twenty acres of willow swamp.)

If you wanna have a good day this summer, try making a cane or walking stick. You could start by looking for a suitable tree branch at the edge of a creek or swamp. Or you could look at the edge of an industrial park. No fancy ornamental trees will do. Only common, ordinary, plebian plants: scruffy swamp willows.

It helps if they are about three centimetres (an inch) in diameter and branch-free for about a metre. Then hack, snap, saw, prune, or pinch off the branch, get a lawn chair and a pocket knife, and get to work peeling the green bark.

How much you peel depends on how fancy you want to make your stick. I like to leave some cambium on so that there are stripes and blotches of brown showing on the finished product. (This is the type of stick that the Patriarch Jacob used to increase his herd of striped and spotted sheep, but that's another story.)

If you have lots of time, you could soak them in a puddle or ditch or bucket first. Or you can just get a knife and go at it.

Walking sticks come in all possible sizes and shapes. Some look like something Gandalf might carry; some look like something you'd use on the first tee of the golf course. You can let the wood decide what its shape will be. Above all, don't try to make things

too straight. Or too smooth: a-symmetrical sticks are just plain more interesting, as well as being more like you.

If mangling willows is not your idea of a good time, try looking for tadpoles. As far as I know, tadpoles are of no economic value, which means that their pursuit is probably just what you need. They don't come equipped with battery packs or hard drives, so there is not much to go wrong. Tadpoles also help your ethics: no one eats them (though Isaac feigns it well); they help you practice catch-and-release. (Even PETA doesn't mind if you just look at them.) And if your tadpoles grow up to be toads, they eat slugs.

Here's another way to have a great day in the summer. See if your neighbour or friend will let you play in the manure. Or

get a load of sawdust/manure from a horse farmer and dump it on your yard. I told someone that my friend Justin brought me a load of crap and that I was very grateful; this confused the listener, so you'd best use the word manure.

Besides spreading the manure on a garden, or using it to help speed up your compost process, you can also do interesting things with it. Logan and Isaac discovered that setting the hose nozzle on "jet" enabled them to blast tunnels and roads in the manure. (Knocking holes in manure may be a practical skill if one is ever involved with bureaucracies. . . but I digress.)

I've given you three recipes for summer fun. There are lots more. Getting a ride in a wheelbarrow has its moments. So does stacking firewood.



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Worship

The whole earth is full of his glory: The recovery of authentic worship (Part Two)

Albert Mohler

Where shall we turn for instruction on how we ought to worship? There is only one place we can turn, and that is to the Word of God. The norm of our worship must be the Word of God – this Word that He has spoken. As we turn to this Word, we do see a pattern of worship, a pattern that is replicated throughout the fabric of Scripture from beginning to end.

Scripture is, as the Reformers confessed, *norma normans non normata*, (The norm of norms which cannot be normed). *Sola Scriptura*. This is the norm of our worship. There is nothing external to Scripture that can norm or correct it. Scripture sets the terms, and in Isaiah 6:1-8 we see a picture of authentic worship.

In this well-known “call” passage of Isaiah, the prophet experienced a theophany: a vision of the true and living God. Out of this encounter, Isaiah received his call as a prophet.

Isaiah recounts that it was in the year of King Uzziah’s death that he saw the Lord sitting on a throne lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple.

What does it mean that God sat on a throne? Well, clearly it is a symbol of kingship and sovereignty. The throne indicates that the one who sits upon it is both king and judge. It represents both power and righteousness.

But there is more to this high and exalted Lord who revealed himself to Isaiah. The one whose train filled the temple with his glory is not alone. Isaiah is not alone. There are beings here with him. Verse two tells us that “seraphim stood above him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.”

These seraphim (literally, “burning ones”) had six wings, and these six wings convey a great deal of symbolism. “With two he covered his face.” That must certainly indicate humility. They dared not look at the holiness of God. “And with two he covered his feet.” Surely this represents purity. “And with two he flew.” But these winged creatures are not merely flying. “And one called out to another and said, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory.”

We know the words, “Holy, Holy, Holy” as the “trisagion.” In the Hebrew language there is no adequate comparative or superlative form, so the pattern of repetition is used in order to make a point. We see this thrice-repeated pattern again in Revelation 4:8-11: “And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God, the almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.”

The early church saw in this pattern a Trinitarian understanding. As we look back with New Testament eyes, we can certainly



Interior of traditional church. Contrast this with modern churches.

see that affirmation, but the central point of this construction seems to be the same as in Genesis 14:10. There we find reference to the construction “pit, pit,” which may be translated “deep and great pit.” It is one thing to fall into a pit. It is another thing to fall into a “pit, pit.” But here we see God’s essence, identity, and being characterized by the attribute of holiness.

What does the holiness of God mean? It means certainly his separateness from his creation. He is what we are not. We are finite; he is infinite. God is transcendent. God’s separateness certainly reveals the difference, the infinite contrast between his moral nature and ours. Holiness also certainly refers to his majesty and power.

J. Alec Motyer defines holiness as “God’s total and unique moral majesty.” It is a wonderful expression – God’s total and unique moral majesty. E. J. Young suggests that holiness is the entirety of the divine perfection that separates God from his creation. That which is almost beyond our definition is what makes God, God. Holiness includes all God’s attributes. His holiness is that which defines him.

I wonder if the vision of God held by so many who come to worship is anything like what the seraphim are telling us here. Do we worship with the understanding that God is holy and that “the whole earth is full of his glory?” I fear not. I wonder if in our worship we encounter anything like this vision of God. Do those who come to our services of worship come face to face with the reality of God? Or do they go away with a vision of some lesser God, some dehydrated deity? Worship is the people of God gathering together to confess his worthiness, his “worthship.” How can we do that if we do not make clear who God is? Our very pattern of worship must testify to the character of God.

There is a polarity between the objective and the subjective. There is the subjective in worship. But what Scripture makes clear

is that the subjective experience of worship must be predicated on the objective truth of the true and living God, and on an experience of the God who has revealed Himself in Scripture.

Roger Scruton, a well-known British philosopher, has suggested that worship is the most important indicator of what persons or groups really believe about God. These are his words: “God is defined in the act of worship far more precisely than he is defined by any theology.” What Scruton is saying is, in essence: “If you want to know what a people really believe about God, don’t spend time reading their theologians, watch them worship. Listen to what they sing. Listen to what they say. Listen to how they pray. Then you will know what they believe about this God whom they worship.”

My haunting thought concerning much evangelical worship is that the God of the Bible would never be known by watching us worship. Instead what we see in so many churches is “McWorship” of a “McDeity.” But what kind of God is that superficial, that weightless, and that insignificant? Would an observer of our worship have any idea of the God of the Bible from our worship? I wonder at times if this is an accidental development, or if it is an intentional evasion.

George Hunter III suggests that a thriving church must practice “celebrative worship.” He offers two reasons: “1) To provide a celebration to which pre-Christians can relate and find meaning. 2) To remove the cringe factor by providing a service our people would love to invite their friends to, rather than a service they would dread inviting their friends to.”

Here is a fascinating reversal. The purpose of celebrative worship, first, is to provide “a celebration to which pre-Christians can relate.” But, second, he suggests removing anything he identifies as “the cringe factor” by providing a service to which our people would love to invite their

friends and not one that they would dread to invite their friends to attend.

But, as we read the Scripture, it is clear that there is a great deal of the cringe factor in there. In fact, if you are going to remove the cringe factor from Scripture, then you are going to end up with a very thin book.

Hebrews 10:31 reveals, “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” I wonder if there is anything that could even be remotely suggested as a terrifying reality as we present the God we claim to worship in what we do and what we say. Just look at the decline in our hymnody.

Scripture tells us that we should speak “to one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Eph 5:19). But how are our hymns to be measured? We must measure them by their content, by the God they reveal, and here we see a decline in evangelical hymnody. We see a surrender of conviction and accommodation to the culture. We see nothing less than a “dumbing down” of its contents. We have gone from “Holy, Holy, Holy” to “God the Swell Fellow.”

In her book, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*, Marva Dawn has suggested that so much of contemporary music is an evacuation of Christian conviction. It is not just a matter of taste and style, it is not just the abandonment of meter and form and hymnody and structure – it is the abandonment of content. We must avoid such an abandonment. But we must also be clear that not all that goes under the label of “praise and worship music” is an abandonment of doctrinal truth. Much of it is richly biblical. Much of it is taken directly out of the Psalter and other biblical passages.

But the salient question is “By what standard are we to judge worship?” Is it simply the taste or style of the congregation’s choosing? So much of what passes for music, for praise, in our congregations comes down to endless repetition of choruses which, as one critic has suggested, comes down to this: “one word, two notes, and three hours.” We have all been there.

What is the result of this accommodated Christianity? I quote Tozer again: We have simplified until Christianity amounts to this: God is love; Jesus died for you; believe, accept, be jolly, have fun and tell others. And away we go – that is the Christianity of our day. I would not give a plug nickel for the whole business of it. Once in a while God has a poor bleeding sheep that manages to live on that kind of thing and we wonder how.

True worship begins with a vision of the God of the Bible – the true and living God.

(Part 1 appeared in the June 11 issue)
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Ecclesiastes

Our appreciation for life requires a lifetime of training

*Remember your Creator
in the days of your youth,
before the days of trouble come
and the years approach when you will say,
"I find no pleasure in them."*

Ecclesiastes 12:1

A. A. van Ruler

It is good for us to devote much time thinking about God. It is the best way — perhaps the only way — for us to realize that we do actually exist and what that involves. What are we really? Are we simply foam on the roiled water of being? Are we little more than a flicker of light on the surface of nothingness? Are we the bad dream of an evil spirit who does not exist? Are we a beautiful veil of appearance over an abyss of eternal silence? Are we truly here, or are we just imagining it?

There are reasons for all these speculations about the nature of reality, but the Preacher answers them with a resounding No. They are false leads, for we are creatures, that is, we are the handiwork of our Creator. This is the reason we can be sure that we truly exist. We have been called into existence by his will. And therefore our existence is worthwhile; it is worth the trouble to be. In fact, God himself is pleased by the fact that we are here.

So everything hangs on the fact that we, too, are pleased to be here.

We may think and debate long and hard about the question whether life and the world have any meaning, but this doesn't touch the heart of the matter. The heart of the matter is this — that God is pleased for us to be here and that we should therefore be pleased too.

This is why we must remember our Creator. For only then do we fully realize that we actually are and that we are genuinely real — that we are something and that this is a good thing. Only the person who remembers God finds himself in his full reality and meaning.

Religion, worship, church, the liturgy, prayer and praise are, therefore, enormously important, for in all these we remember God.

It is, of course, true that we are always in the presence of God, even when we're harvesting potatoes or when we are piloting a supersonic jet across the heavens. Everything we do in this life is before the face of God.

But when we go to church, we voluntarily, visibly and deliberately go to stand before his face. We enter into the presence of our Creator. In the church's liturgy we realize what is true in our entire culture. Here it is we who come to God. And in so doing we first come fully into ourselves.

This is one side of the medal: that to experience our own selves in our full reality it is necessary to remember our Creator. The other side of the medal is that when we do remember our Creator then we find ourselves in our full reality. There's no other possibility. We cannot erase ourselves and the world in order to be left with God alone.

We do try to do this again and again. We tell ourselves, I'm nothing but a drop in the ocean, and soon I'll return whence I came. Or we tell ourselves, Everything is nothing but a projection, and the way to wisdom and insight is to rid ourselves of our projections and to reach nirvana.

But this is not at all the way of the Bible. In the Bible God is the Creator. He called us into being, and now we are here. And this is his will. It is also his will that we will ourselves to be. Those who acknowledge God will also acknowledge themselves and the world.

Perhaps this is the biggest problem for many. We often say that our biggest problem is the question of God's exis-



Three self portraits by Rembrandt



What was it that prompted artists like Rembrandt to focus more closely on the individual self? Was it the rediscovery of the holiness of all created things?

tence. We never seem to be able to come to any certainty on that score. But is this true? Perhaps it's our own existence and that of the world that is the biggest problem. Not, perhaps, in the sense that we cannot come to any certainty about it, but in the sense that we cannot muster the courage and zeal to take life and the world so seriously that we confess they are God's creation, a gift of our Creator, and therefore wholly holy. If we erase God as the Creator, we no longer need to affirm life and the world from the bottom of our hearts.

Perhaps this is why we often prefer to doubt God's existence.

Whatever the case, the Preacher says we must begin early. It is best if we begin to do so in the days of our youth. That's when we still have plenty of zest for it, when we can still enjoy life. When we are young we still want to take the world by storm. We still take it all seriously, passionately.

Do it with all your might, says the Preacher. Do it from the very bottom of your heart. Do it from the very ground of your existence. And the ground of your existence and of the world is the will of your Creator. In all your doing and in all your passion penetrate to this ground: remember your Creator. Come to the full realization of what you are and what that implies.

Later this will change. The days of your youth are the best time. Later evil days will come, days in which you will say, I have no pleasure in them. The zest for life will languish and so will your passions.

In the end, many no longer believe in anything. They think life is meaningless, nothing, and that the world is nothing but a mad witch's brew in which nothing turns out as intended. All their pleasure in the world fades away.

But then their delight in God is gone as well. Anyone who no longer believes in life and in the world, no longer believes in God. This, at least, is the biblical view of reality.

More often than not, we put things very differently. We say, the older we get, the more we turn away from the world's hurly-burly. We are readying ourselves for death. Our thoughts turn to the hereafter. We begin to meditate on things eternal. We seek our pleasure in God.

But this way of thinking collapses the sharp difference between Christian faith and paganism. If we take this literally and mean by it that we can take pleasure in God and in godly things only by rejecting and scorning the things of this world, then we have reverted to outright paganism.

Christianity also seeks to take pleasure in God and in godly things, but it takes pleasure in the God who created all things. So the godly things are therefore worldly things. We

can also put it the other way around: the worldly things are godly things. It makes no difference. The point is this: from the biblical perspective, those who grow mature in the faith get an ever deeper and more intense delight in what God has in mind with his world.

But, truth be told, this is not easy. When old age with all its troubles and frailties comes upon us, when we are confronted by death, it is not easy to genuinely keep believing in God, to sustain our hope for life and for the world. From the Preacher's viewpoint, old age is not just a time of trials but also of temptations. Before we realize it, we find ourselves caught in the snares of the Evil One and sinking into sin. We become grumpy and morose, listless and dispirited, apathetic and despairing. We no longer take pleasure in anything.

The time of our youth is the best time to have faith in God and to remember our Creator.

This is as far as the Preacher goes in this passage. But I think we continue in the spirit of his words if we add another saying: What is planted young bears fruit in old age. [Dutch adage: Jong geleerd is oud gedaan. Literally: What's learned in youth is done in old age.] This is another reason why it is good when you are in the years of youth, strength and beauty to train yourself to develop a sense of reality that penetrates to the ground of life, to remembering your Creator. This sort of training really bears fruit. It is a sport that puts steel into your spiritual muscles.

If we live this way from the days of our youth, in full awareness of being in the presence of our Creator, the days of our old age may still bring trials and temptations. In fact, there may be times when we simply want to throw in the towel. But then we can fall back on that old pattern of trusting God that is still part of us. We can nurture that trust.

We can fall back on it as if on a fundamental axiom. In this way, God's creatorship and the reality of the creation that is given in that belief become the a priori [the foundational starting point] of our existence. I believe that this can become so strong in us that when we are lying on our death bed, in the hour of our death we can still say 'Amen!' to ourselves as God's creation, still love life, and still nurture unlimited expectations for the world. But to get that far we have to begin as early as possible.

There are, of course, those who have let the days of their youth slip by without remembering their Creator. But the Bible in many places reminds us that a person can turn back to God at any time. In any case, we are all continually called to embrace this truth and this joy in the reality of all things.

Christian living

The first step on the road to the new earth

Lou DeVries

I suppose that from time to time everyone contemplates questions about life and death. As Christians, who believe that Christ has promised us eternal life, we are faced with the question: "Where are our loved ones who have 'fallen asleep' and where are they until the return of the Lord? Are they in heaven or are they sleeping somewhere?"

We, who are still in this world, ought to ask ourselves this question also because there is a day that we will die and are faced with the transition to the "unknown". Whatever the answer to this question is, it ought not to be our answer but the bible's — God's, answer. Scripture, indeed, does make promises to us concerning such an important happening. We, however, are reluctant; have a certain fear, to contemplate the promises God makes on this subject.

We know that, after we have "fallen asleep," the body is destroyed. This is according to the word of the Lord in Genesis 3:19: "for dust you are and to dust you will return." As Christians we believe that the soul is not destroyed; the soul lives on. After we have fallen asleep we enter into a state which the theologians call "status intermedius" (In plain English, "the intermediate state").

This state will continue until (another theological word) the Parousia, which means the return of Christ.

After the Parousia we will be part of the new heaven and the new earth. The expression "intermediate state," however, is not mentioned anywhere in the Bible. Searching the Scriptures will provide the evidence that believers indeed do enter this state at the moment of their "falling asleep." Scripture states that the relationship between God and the believer will never be broken or interrupted. There is continuity in our relationship with God, it started in this life and continues in our existence in the intermediate state and beyond.

Some believe that when our body has "fallen asleep," the soul also is asleep. They realize that although it is asleep, God's relationship with us still exists. All it means is that there is a change in our awareness of this relationship. Now the question arises: "Are we throughout our presence in this intermediate state aware of our relationship with the Lord or do we become aware of it again at the end

of our stay there? The Heidelberg catechism has part of the answer to the question: "What comfort does 'the resurrection of the body' give you?" says: "That after this life my soul shall be immediately taken up to Christ." (Q and A 57)

Similar statements are made in the Westminster and Second Helvetic confessions. The immediacy of the soul's "arrival" in the intermediate state and its awareness of being in the presence of Christ is expressed in the Heidelberg Catechism in the word "immediately". The Westminster Confession says: "The souls of the righteous, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies."

The Second Helvetic Confession declares: "We believe that the faithful, after bodily death, go directly unto Christ."

Two scripture passages (there are more) "certify" the correctness of the immediacy in the above statements.

The first is found in the answer to the criminal, crucified with Jesus, who asked to be remembered when Jesus comes into His kingdom: "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43)

A second passage that indicates immediacy is in the letter of Paul to the Philippians Phil. 1:23. Paul writes that he is torn between two things, and then states: "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far."

In the English language this does not necessarily indicate immediacy, but the sentence construction in the Greek indicates that the "depart" and "be with Christ" are two sides of the same happening.

The Bible teaches that after this "falling asleep," we indeed will be in heaven, which is being with the Lord. We should realize that our presence in the intermediate state is incomplete; it is only the first step on the road to the new earth. Completion does not take place until after the resurrection of the body.

Two books I recommend to you are:

1. *The Bible and the Future* by Anthony A. Hoekema who was Professor of Systematic theology at Calvin Theological Seminary. The book is published by Eerdmans in Grand Rapids MI

2. *Systematic Theology* by

All things butter

Maynard van der Galien

Take some rich milk, skim off the cream, shake it around for five minutes or so and you have butter. It's one of our natural foods. Butter is not a modern invention. It has been a human staple for nearly 10,000 years. And it may have shaped history more than you think.

The earliest biblical mention of milk and milk products can be found in the book of Genesis chapter 18, vs. 7. There it says Abraham treated three male visitors to a kind of pancake, butter or cheese curds, milk and roast veal from a fat calf that was butchered for the occasion.

The milk was probably quite fatty — from a beef cow. It says Abraham ran out to the herd and chose a fat calf and told a servant to hurry and butcher it.

Drawings in both the Sahara Desert dating back to 6,000 BC and Babylonia

temples dating back to 3,000 BC depict dairy cattle, milk containers and strainers. Biblical, Sanskrit, early Egyptian, Greek and Roman writings all mention milk and dairy products.

Hindu writings dating 2-3,000 BC also mention milk and dairy products.

One Hindu legend goes beyond the concept of the cow as the foster mother of mankind. In this story a great flood destroys all creatures on the earth except one man. He survives by fastening the rope of his boat to a tree on a high mountain. Being lonely the man offers a sacrifice of clarified butter, sour milk, whey and curds and pours it into the surrounding water. Thence a woman was produced in a year, becoming quite solid, she rose, clarified butter gathering in her footprints. This man and his new bride went on to become the ancestors of a new human race.

Some researchers believe that races who included milk and milk products in their diets were stronger and lived longer than those who subsisted on cereals, roots and fruits. The Viking pirates that plundered and pillaged from the 8th-10th Century gave supported to this theory. They were known for carrying large quantities of butter with them.

Cooler temperatures in northern Europe allowed butter to be kept longer before spoiling. Scandinavian has the longest history in Europe of a butter export trade, dating at least to the 12th century. Across most of Europe after the fall of Rome and through much of the Middle Ages, butter was a common food, but one with a low reputation. It was consumed mostly by peasants. It slowly became more acceptable to the upper class, especially when, in the early 16th century, the Roman Catholic Church finally permitted its consumption during

L.Berkhof, another former professor of systematic theology at the same seminary. Eerdmans published his book also.

I have freely used the information, the wisdom expressed in those books to present to you what the Bible says about the intermedi-

ate state.

Don't be impressed by the label "Systematic Theology": it only means that the "word of God" (Theos logos) has been collected in certain subjects, like what does the Bible have to say about the intermediate state. Many

other subjects are dealt with, for instance: the return of the Lord and the resurrection of the body.

Maybe these books are in your church library, or maybe your pastor is able to direct you to a source. Books like these will strengthen your Christian faith.



Children from Barnderg National School test the 300 year old lump of bog butter found by turf cutters at Poll na gCapaill Bog, Co Galway in May 1999. The butter was in a wicker basket, and although not edible it smelled and looked like very cold, hard, butter.

Lent. Bread and butter became common fare among the new middle class, and the English, in particular, gained a reputation for their liberal use of melted butter as a sauce for meats and vegetables.

Across northern Europe — Ireland, Scotland, Iceland and Scandinavian — butter was sometimes treated in a manner unheard of today. It was packed into barrels (firkin) and buried in peat bogs, perhaps for years. Such "bog butter" would develop a strong flavor as it aged, but remained edible, in large part because of the unique cool, airless, antiseptic and acidic environment of a peat bog.

Firkins of such buried butter are a common archaeological find in Ireland. The Irish National Museum has some containing "a grayish cheese-like substance, partially hardened, not like the butter we know" on display. The practice was most common in Ireland in the 11th-14th centuries.

France, like Ireland, became well-known for its butter, particularly in the Normandy and Brittany regions. By the 1860's, butter had become so in demand that the emperor offered prize money for an inexpensive substitute to supplement France's inadequate butter supplies.

In 1869, a French chemist claimed the prize with the invention of margarine.

Today, India produces and consumes more butter than any other nation. Yes, India. Second in production is the United States. Germany is second after India in butter consumption.

An interesting Old Dutch proverb says it all: "Eat butter first and eat it last and live till a hundred years be past."

Maynard van der Galien is a retired dairy farmer who loves the taste of butter and buttermilk.



Mission

A grandmother's faithfulness; a father's love; a prodigal's return

Rob Greidanus
(Mbudi Za Ndokotora)

Greetings once again from Southern Africa! This last month has been another emotional one in Rundu. At times the pain of loss experienced here is so enormous, that it is hard to do it justice in writing. However, I will attempt to give you a glimpse of it through the stories of two families over the last weeks.

The first family is headed by an incredible grandmother. She came with her 6 week-old granddaughter to my clinic. The baby's mother, her daughter, was found to be HIV positive during the pregnancy and subsequently to have advanced

AIDS. Although by Namibia's guidelines the mother qualified for ARV medications prior to delivery, as is common here, she presented very late in the pregnancy for antenatal care and the HIV test so medicine could not be commenced in time. Tragically, she died 3 weeks after delivery from HIV related complications.

So this grand matriarch took over care of the new granddaughter and another child left behind by her daughter. The baby's father had also died in the last 6 months, presumably from HIV related infections.

At 6 weeks of age all the babies that are born of HIV positive mothers are tested for HIV. So, out of concern for her grandchild, grandma took up this responsibility. As I examined the baby and asked questions of the grandmother, I inquired how she would now feed this baby. She was uncertain and acknowledged that baby formula was too expensive for her, as it is for most families in Rundu. Even cow's milk is almost out of reach financially for most people here. Both she and her husband are unemployed and so have no income to support children in their senior years, let alone for looking after themselves.

What makes this story even more remarkable is that this was not the first time that grandma and grandpa have pitched up for their children. You see, they were blessed with 4 children of their own – all daughters. In this culture it is usually the mother's family that looks after grandchildren if the birth mother passes away. During our short time together, this amazing grandmother unfolded the almost unbelievable story of how all 4 of her daughters have died in the last few years. HIV claimed all of them during what should have been the prime of their lives.

So now this lady looks after all 12 of her grandchildren almost single handedly. At an age where this lady's children should be caring for her, grandma's house has turned into a large family orphanage. She was liv-

ing day by day, not knowing if she would have food enough for herself or for all the grandchildren in her home. She went on to tell me how she trusted in God's provision despite the trials she faces on a daily basis.

It didn't take me long to get on the phone and plead with the hospital social worker for assistance. Sadly, social workers here are overrun with situations like these. However, she assured me that she would do something to help this brave lady – at least supply formula for the baby until it was 6 months of age. I look forward to seeing this incredible grandma again when she comes in for the baby's HIV results in the coming weeks. I am praying that the result will come back favorable for this vulnerable infant. I am also praying that God will give me wisdom on how to best help this family and others that face similar dreadful circumstances. This grandmother is an inspiration to me and a flickering light of hope in a society devastated by HIV/AIDS.

The next story is one of a modern day Prodigal son and his extraordinary father. Pastor Domingue and his large family are probably the closest to us of any in the Rundu community. In addition to being the leader of our church, we consider Pastor and his family to be our good friends. They have welcomed us openly from our first days here, and we have walked some difficult journeys together.

Phillipus, the prodigal son, was the second born to pastor Domingue and his wife. In his early twenties Phillipus set out from his Rundu home looking for adventure. He landed in South Africa, where he got in with a rough crowd and led a party life style. Phillipus was nicknamed 'Tyson' by his friends because of his physical strength and the way he battled others on the streets. He fathered 4 children with various women along the way and eventually landed himself in jail.

In this culture, shaming your family is probably the worse thing you can do as a child, especially as the son of a pastor. Yet, Pastor Domingue, in his great love for his son, went to visit Phillipus in jail to encourage him to change his ways and come back home. As time passed, Phillipus' rebellion continued – until at last something slowed him down. Unknowingly, he had acquired HIV infection and his once strong body was becoming weaker by the day. However, it was through this weakness that he discovered new humility and wisdom. So he made the journey back to Rundu looking for a second chance and for the love of his family.

Most fathers in this culture would reject a son like this who has brought disgrace to the family. However, Pastor Domingue welcomed him back with open arms and forgave him, putting the past behind them. More than that, he took compassion on him and wanted his physical and spiritual health restored.

This is when I first met Phillipus. His

father brought him to me at the hospital to try to sort out his illness. Although initially I was unaware of his wild past, my first examination of him proved very suspicious for HIV infection. I counseled him for HIV testing and he quite readily agreed. The result came back positive and subsequently his CD4 was found to be very low, confirming AIDS had set in.

We started him on anti-retrovirals and other necessary medication with hopes that he would regain his strength. He rallied for some time and we fought together to try to overcome this terrible disease. However, his CD4 count started to dwindle over the course of the next year despite our efforts.

Early this year he was co-infected with T.B. and this further weakened his body. He was put on a second line ARV regimen and anti-T.B. drugs but even they failed to restore his strength. Countless times he was seen by me in the clinic or hospitalized for opportunistic infection treatment. Every time he came to me, his loving father was at his side. Never once did I hear words of judgment or criticism from Pastor about his son's previous sinful life and the consequences it now bore. That was behind; he only wanted to walk with his son today and give him hope for tomorrow.

In the last few months Phillipus developed hypersplenism (a large and overactive spleen) and pancytopenia (low red cells, white cells, and platelets). He also developed brown plaques on his skin and palate. The new diagnosis was Kaposi's sarcoma with internal organ involvement. This was a serious consequence of advanced HIV infection. In desperation we consulted oncology in Windhoek and they decided to give a try of chemotherapy. However, the medicine only weakened his body further. Despite our best efforts and those of his family, Phillipus died early this month.

Over the last few weeks my wife and I have grieved openly with this family that we love. We discovered that their mourning is very different than ours. We are very private in our grief, but they grieve visibly and in community. As Alisa and I visited their home on the day of Phillipus' death, there were about 50 close friends and family sitting on the sand outside his hut. The door to his home was open, but no one was inside. Instead they were seated outside wailing and visibly distraught. What could we say at a time like this? We had no words and so we just sat in sorrow along side them. In Western fashion, I fought back the tears; until pastor approached me. His face was etched in misery. We embraced in love and



he sobbed in sorrow on my shoulder. I could no longer restrain the tears either.

The next few days brought the busyness of funeral preparations, memorials at the church, and eventually the burial. It was physically and emotionally exhausting, but at the same time cleansing and somehow therapeutic for all who were present. I was privileged to be able to participate in all of the proceedings. It was the least I could do for my fallen comrade.

I have learned a lot this month about the local culture and how my friends in Rundu deal with grief in a town where it is so common. But I have also learned about love; the great love of a father for a son, and the pure love of Christ displayed through his people.

So, you can see, it has been a rough month emotionally for me. However, amongst the pain of loss there have been glimmers of hope and gladness. My greatest joy has been the confident assurance of Phillipus' salvation. You see, through the suffering he went through over these past months came a tremendous transformation. Through the love of his family and by God's grace, Phillipus was reborn. During our time together and our meaningful conversations at the bed side, I noticed big changes in my brother Phillipus. Where at one time he exhibited anger, hopelessness, and desperation; in his last weeks he displayed a peace that surpasses all understanding. The metamorphosis was amazing.

When 'Tyson' was at the pinnacle of physical strength, he was spiritually weak. But when this terrible illness made him physically frail, he became spiritually strong. Christ's power was made completely perfect in his weakness. For when he was weak, he was strong. So much so, that Phillipus' last words spoken came straight from his transformed heart. They were spoken to none other than his loving father who was sitting at his bedside to the very end. In the dying words of Phillipus my friend; "God is great!"

By His grace, power, and love,

Ndokotora Rob

Balls, rocks and sand

Follow the bouncing ball

Daphne Simpkins

When Mildred Budge heard the TV talk show guest explain that psychologists often play a game of catch with male patients to establish a rapport, she leaned closer to the TV screen and listened intently.

"Men sometimes interpret being spoken to as a form of aggression," the therapist said. "They brace against attack. That's why men may sit or stand sideways when addressed," the man said, looking at the perky TV hostess sideways.

"Was that true?" Mildred wondered.

Miss Budge was a lifetime single lady, and though she had turned down various romantic proposals (It was easy when a man asked over a hot dog, "Why don't me and you get married?"), she had often had questions about communicating with men.

At times, Miss Budge blamed her antiquated vocabulary. Just thinking about the word 'antiquated' impelled Mildred to say out loud "Groovy," a word that had gone to sleep for a while and woken back up. Miss Budge tried to say groovy as much as possible now, but she had stopped saying, "I heartily concur" after people said "Praise the Lord!" Too many people looked at her strangely and, sometimes, sideways.

She did not blame her own vocabulary, for few words did justice to praising God well. Now, Miss Budge often agreed with other Christians by simply nodding her head vigorously. But surely there could be more to sharing commonplace information than enthusiastic though silent agreement.

A persevering problem-solver, Miss Budge decided to try the bouncing ball technique proposed as a communication tool to use with quiet, guarded men.

The next time she passed a vending machine at the grocery store that sold a miniature bouncing ball for a quarter, Mildred Budge spent fifty cents. Buying two conversational icebreakers quickly proved to be a groovy idea, for as soon as Miss Budge attempted to practice dribbling the one with blue and white swirls, it got away from her and rolled off silently down the street. She prudently placed the other one – a miniature black and white soccer ball – in her purse next to her spare set of house keys for an opportune moment when she could test this new idea of playing ball with a man in order to communicate better.

No stranger on the street looked groovy enough initially, though there was a man coming out of the gas station who held the door for her and said very chirpily to her derriere as she passed through, "There you go, pretty lady."

"Thank you, handsome stranger," Mildred replied, as her hand inched toward the rubber ball. No time to follow through, however. A diesel-burning truck steered loudly away from the gas pump and drowned out what might have developed.

The next time Miss Budge felt inclined to use the soccer ball was during the morning church service when the deacon who made the announcements – not the preacher – stood up and whispered the news of the week, imparting very little information to inquiring Christian minds that wanted to know the details of who had been born, how much the newborn weighed, and then who had died, and when was the funeral.

Former school teacher Miss Budge would ordinarily have said, "Speak up young man," but she attended a church where women were still admonished to be silent. That was fine with Mildred. She didn't even want to discuss that issue anymore! She had made friends with the Apostle Paul and silence over the years.

But when the person who is supposed to speak has some real information that can't be heard, Miss Budge found herself stirred to reach for the small black and white soccer ball in her purse. As she gripped it, Miss Budge considered sending the ball bouncing down the aisle toward the deacon, but there was



a small boy on his knees in the next pew watching her. When the lad espied Miss Budge's small soccer ball, his brown eyes lit up.

A veteran church woman who routinely pulled out Advil, Kleenex, and cough drops for whoever needed them, Mildred automatically handed the miniature soccer ball to the young boy. Trained to be polite by his mother, grandmother, aunts, and the wives of deacons and elders who were his Sunday school teachers, the boy leaned forward and opened his mouth to say "thank you," then stopped when Miss Budge raised one authoritative finger to her pursed lips.

He drew back in surprise, turned sideways, and stayed silent.

After the church service, Miss Budge heard his mother ask him, "Where did that ball come from?"

Miss Budge watched as the little fellow considered the question and what he was supposed to say or do. He stared hard at Miss Budge who had been nice to him. "Would she get in trouble if he told?"

"Did you say thank you?" his mother pressed.

He scratched his ear: "Sometimes you're supposed to say thank you – but then, sometimes you're not."

He shrugged silently, jammed the ball in his pant pocket, and walked stolidly away.

His mother shook her head ruefully at her boy's sullenness, and apologized to Miss Budge, "He's just like his daddy. He doesn't say much either."

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

Life in a jar...

This month I just want to share this metaphor.

"A philosophy professor stood before his class with several items in front of him. When his class began, he picked up an empty glass jar and proceeded to fill it with rocks about 2 inches in diameter. When he asked his students if the jar was full, they agreed it was.

The professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles, of course, rolled into the open area between the rocks. He asked the students again if the jar was full. They agreed it was.

He then picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up the rest of the space. He then asked once more if the jar was full. The students responded with a unanimous yes.

The professor then produced two cans of beer from under the table and proceeded to pour the entire contents into the jar. The students laughed.

"Now," said the professor, as the laughter subsided, "I want you to recognize that this jar represents your life. The rocks are the important things – your family, your partner, your health, your children – things that if everything else were lost and only they remained, your life would still be full. The pebbles are the other things that matter – like your job, your home. The sand is everything else. The small stuff.

"If you put the sand into the jar first," he continued, "there is no room for the pebbles or the rocks. The same is true of your life. If you spend most of your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are important to you.

"Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness. Play with your children. Take time to get medical checkups. Take your partner out dancing. There will always be time to go to work, clean the house, give a dinner party and fix the disposal."

When one of the students raised her hand and inquired what the beer represented, the professor smiled, "I'm glad you asked. It just goes to show you that no matter how full your life may seem, there's always room for a couple of beers."

(Author unknown, taken from VDDS newsletter)

For me the beer metaphor represents the sense of playfulness we need in our lives so we do not become too heavily burdened with the seriousness of living. And in that spirit I would like to wish all C.C. readers a blessed and enjoyable summer with family and friends!

Arlene Van Hove is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC. She can be reached at avanhove@shaw.ca

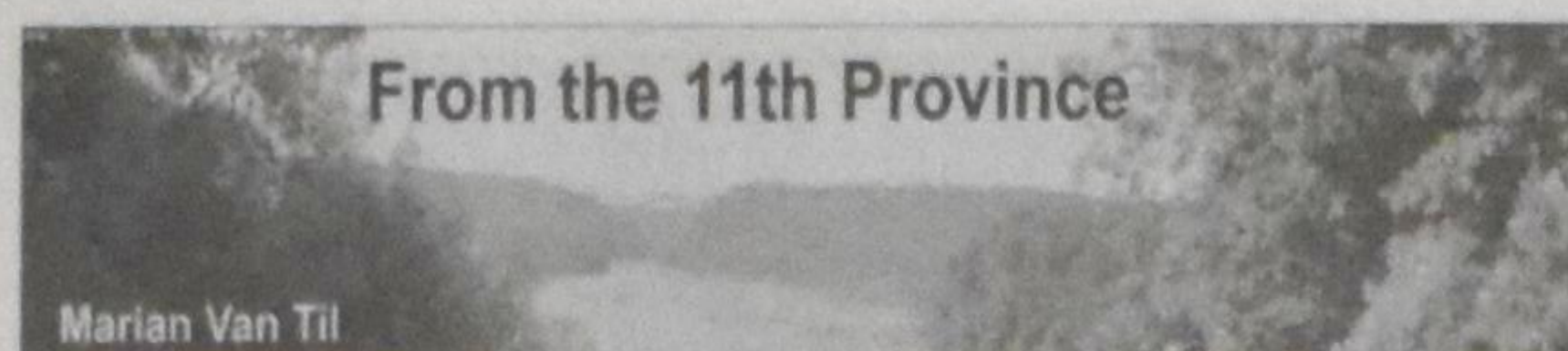


The most eloquent prayer is the prayer through hands that heal and bless.

The highest form of worship is the worship of unselfish Christian service. The greatest form of praise is the sound of consecrated feet seeking out the lost and helpless.

Billy Graham

Reflections



From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til

It's amazing what you can read in the Bible! It's astounding how the Bible portrays God – and us. Most of today's major-media reporters on the world's ills and injustices, and perceived ills and injustices, apparently aren't very aware of what's in that Book. If they were they might come up with a way to defend book banning. And fast. The Bible's message and the God who presents it and reveals himself in it are increasingly offensive to modern "post-Christian" sensibilities.

The Bible is dangerous, but not, as some are arguing, for excessive militance, exclusivity or teachings against homosexual acts – though the "danger" I'm thinking of is certainly related to how we live our lives, in private and in public.

The Bible is dangerous because it introduces us to, then lets us get to know intimately and be called by the name of, the God and Savior of the universe. And, as C.S. Lewis put it in child-simple but allegory-like terms in his first Narnian Chronicle, "Aslan is not a tame lion." You can't expect to meet Aslan while wandering through the woods one day, all nonchalant, without the encounter both thrilling you and scaring the daylights out of you, then radically changing the rest of your life. You can't expect to meet the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and Christ who bled for us, without being shaken to the core by the confrontation.

If not, why not?

If our Bible reading and our meeting God in every Bible book hasn't penetrated us in that profound manner – if it hasn't made us pull up stakes like Abram to travel to a land unfamiliar (perhaps not only spiritually); if it hasn't forced us to wrestle with God as Jacob did (limping ever after as permanent reminder of that encounter); if it hasn't startled us with a Damascus Road conversion like bloodthirsty Saul's; if it hasn't resulted in us getting a new name like each of those biblical men on whom God placed his hand – then we need to ask ourselves why not.

Where God is, there is his Spirit: the Spirit sometimes referred to in the New Testament as the Spirit of Christ; the Spirit who stirs that kind of fundamental change, who instructs us (Neh. 9:20), who dogs us (Ps. 139: 7), who gives us wisdom and power (Is. 11:2), who puts words in our mouths when our lives depend on them (Is. 59:21; Matt. 22:43; Mark 13:11), who reveals the truth (John 16: 13) and who gives us life (John 6:63).

New names signify

A new name, in God's parlance, signifies a new life, a radical about-face, a being born again (a phrase we Calvinists still seem leery of, though Jesus uses it). A name, in the Bible, is not just a tag attached to us human beings so that our children can be told apart or so that we're not confused with somebody else. A name reveals the fundamental human self, character, core being, *heart*. And when God stirs big changes in our lives so there's no turning back, we each need a new name to signify it.

So childless Abram becomes Abraham, father of many nations and in whom, through his divine descendent Jesus, all the nations of earth are blessed. So contentious, conniving Jacob becomes Israel, struggler with God. And Saul, perhaps named for the Israelites' first king (who started out so well but whose self-obsession caused the kingdom to be wrested from him) becomes Paul. Paul: "small" or "humble." Paul learned instantly that he wasn't the admirable and righteous keeper of God's law that he thought he was. It's interesting that Saul was on the way to Damascus when Jesus appeared with the (lit-

erally) blinding question, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Centuries earlier, Damascus had evidenced David's royal power in Israel but then became "a heap of ruins" because it had "forgotten God their Savior" (Is. 17: 1, 10). Saul was heading in the direction of those unfaithful, spiritually blind ancestors of his when Jesus called him up short, then turned him into the most fearless and articulate of defenders of Christ's name.

While our culture doesn't put much stock anymore in choosing names that reveal character and have familial significance, if we are steadfast servants of the LORD we do have new names, both familial and personal: our familial name is Children of God, sons and daughters of the Most High, new Israel. And when we have overcome and Christ's Kingdom is consummated at last, Christ will indelibly "write" God's name on us (Rev. 3:12). That God's people would be called by a new name was already prophesied by Isaiah (62:2).

But our victorious Christ has also chosen for each child of his a new name that will be known only to each person who receives it (Rev. 2:17). We will join the others from every tribe, nation and language who will gather before his throne; but he also knows each individual as deeply and personally as it is possible to be known, and he will name us each accordingly.



Mom won that one

Though my parents did not give any of their five children a directly biblical name, I have a sister Sharon whose name I imagine my parents may have linked to the rose of Sharon, the beautifully flowering hibiscus. Since the NIV came out, long after my sister was born and after my parents' time, the one biblical reference to it in the Song of Solomon notes that this "rose" was probably a crocus. (Oh well, crocuses are beautiful too, and in North America are wonderful harbingers of spring.)

I myself narrowly missed being given a name which would have had apt significance, since it was revealed in my early childhood that I had musical talent. My dad wanted to name me Miriam because Moses and Aaron's sister Miriam played the tambourine and danced and sang the wonderful psalm of praise recorded in Exodus 15 after God led the Israelites safely through the Red Sea. But my practical mother objected. She pointed out that later Miriam proved to be whiny, wilful and disobedient, and because of it she suffered leprosy as a judgement from God. (I admit that such behavior also would have applied to me as a child, at least some of the time.) Fortunately, though, my mother prevailed in my naming. So Miriam became Marian.

Dangers and delights

A lovely, affecting act

Much later, when I was a teenager and was left to care for my father after my mother died, he chose another biblical name for me, and used it now and then at home: *Hephzibah*: "My delight is in her." At the time I laughed at the sound of that Hebrew name, even while taking note, as my dad did, that the famous violinist Yehudi Menuhin had a sister named Hephzibah. Yet I think that that very personal and biblical naming by my father was the single most lovely, affecting thing he ever said or did for me; he wasn't the type to easily express love in words. He meant the name both as a declaration of his own delight in me as his daughter and as a prayer that my life would always be one of which my heavenly Father could say: *My delight is in her*.

When you give your child that kind of name in that kind of spirit, even if only for private use, how can it not have repercussions? Some of those repercussions may even be dangerous, dangerous in the way Aslan is not a tame lion and God a God who wrestles with us and wins, sometimes leaving us limping even as he leaves his grace behind as well.

Hephzibah has echoed through my life for nearly 40 years in ways that my father would know little of (he died four years after my mother did, when I was 20). Sometimes it's been hard to see God's delight in me; and there have been a few periods when that delight must have turned to sorrow. But God's delight in us is wonderfully reciprocal and allows us to delight in him in turn. A few exquisite blossoms that obedience produces (urged to growth by the early prayers of godly parents) eventually becomes a garden of delight, through God's grace and Spirit. And that name, with its meaning – *my delight is in her* – sinks deep into the now fertile soil.

Our new name

Isaiah 62, a chapter the NIV entitles "Zion's New Name," tells the story. My dad knew what he was talking about. One day we will all be called *Hephzibah*:

- 3 You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand,
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
4 No longer will they call you Deserted,
or name your land Desolate.
But you will be called Hephzibah,
and your land Beulah;
for the LORD will take delight in you,
and your land will be married.

And at the end of the chapter:

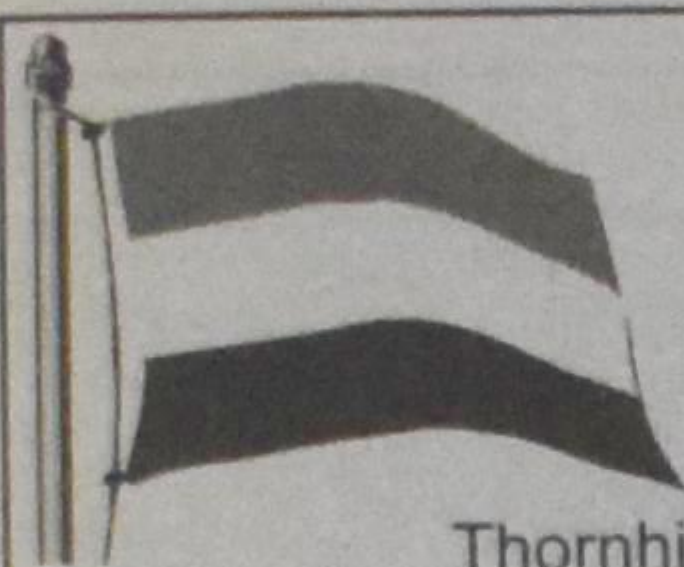
- 11 The LORD has made proclamation
to the ends of the earth:
"Say to the Daughter of Zion,
'See, your Savior comes!
See, his reward is with him,
and his recompense accompanies him.'"
12 They will be called the Holy People,
the Redeemed of the LORD;
and you will be called Sought After,
the City No Longer Deserted.

Marian Van Til worked for CC from 1984-2000, and preceded Harry der Nederlanden as its editor. She now lives in Youngstown, NY. She may be contacted by email at: mvantil@adelphia.net or via her website:

www.wordpowerpublishing.com



Business Directory



Saturday **September 29** 10:00 AM - 10:00 PM
the next

NETHERLANDS BAZAAR

will be held at the
Thornhill Community Centre, 7755 Bayview Avenue, Thornhill

Market Place	10 AM - 6 PM
Auction, Raffle Draw	6 PM - 10 PM
Restaurant	10 AM - 9 PM



What Is The Netherlands Bazaar?

The Committee "Netherlands Bazaar" has been in existence for over fifty years. It is a non-denominational organization that works in consultation with the Netherlands Consulate, religious and community leaders, members of the medical community, Children's Aid Societies, and social service organizations.

Who Do We Help?

The Netherlands Bazaar is held once every two years. 100% of the funds raised are used to provide assistance to needy families of Dutch extraction living in Ontario. Thanks to the generosity of the Bazaar supporters, we were able to distribute 900 food parcels over the past two years, 300 children from needy families were given the opportunity to attend summer camp. Without the support of concerned members of the community, this work could not continue.

Questions?

Please call us if you would like to participate.

Ge Spaans	905-477-1243	Henny DeCloe	416-222-1677
Jannie Thomas	416-498-8706	Dia Pos	905-854-5102
Greta Niemeyer	416-222-2087	Laura Kenny	416-223-7373
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Mailing Address: Committee "Netherlands Bazaar", 15 Pavilion Street, Unionville, ON, L3R 1N8

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Classifieds

Thank You

In gratitude to the Lord **we thank you** our dear friends of CC for all the well-wishes received by card and telephone on the occasion of our 60th Wedding Anniversary. May the Lord bless you all.
Derk & Rie Nanninga
Whitby ON

Birthdays

Your love, O Lord, endures forever. Ps 138:8



ADA GELEYNSE

hopes to celebrate her **85th Birthday** on July 22, 2007.
You are invited to an **Open House** on **Saturday, July 21** from **2.00 - 4.00 p.m.** in the Griffith Auditorium of Spruce Lodge 639 West Gore Street in Stratford, Ontario.
Corresponding address: 13 - 300 John St S Stratford ON N5A 7V5
Best wishes only please.

Happy 70th Birthday
Diane De Boer!



July 19, 2007

Love from your 'kids' and grand'kids'. Mom and Oma, we thank God for the blessing you have been to us throughout all our years.
We invite everyone to an **Open House** for her on Saturday, July 21/07 from 1-3 p.m. at Hope CRC, 64 Buchanan Crescent in Brantford.
Love from Annette & Ned; Linda & Joe (Joey & Val, Jeremy & Angela, Heidi); Marlene; Owen & Tracy (Amber, Brady); Brenda.
Mailing address: Unit 156-261 Stone Church Rd E Hamilton ON L9B 3X3

Anniversaries



Friends, neighbours, fellow choristers, old and present, are invited to celebrate the **50th Wedding Anniversary** of **JERRY AND BARBARA STEHOUWER**

At the family homestead at 7 Farmer Court in Gormley, ON in the afternoon of August 18th, 2007 D.V. from 1.30 till 4.30

Their children look forward to meeting you that day.
Marcia and Emma Lea Jean
Peter & Michelle with Spencer and Corbin
Arnold & Sonya with Lindsay, Trevor and Brendan
Gerald & Monica with Simone and Elise
Leon and Renee Charlene
Agnes & Francisco with Ennelly, Hannah, Francine and ??

Our lives are in God's hands.
Wedding text - Exodus 33:15

Address: 7 Farmer Court
Richmond Hill ON L4E 1A2
E-mail: stehouwerbg@sympatico.ca
Phone 905 887-1915

1952 July 6 2007
"Great is Thy Faithfulness."

HARM AND ALI KELLY (Zantingh)

celebrated 55 years of marriage on July 6, 2007.
Congratulations Mom and Dad, Oma and Opa.
We thank you for your love and care, and your example of faithfulness.
We thank you for teaching us the ways of the Lord and living in your lives the example of that love.
With much love from your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren:
Ina & Harry Bethlehem - Sheri & Arjan Vos, Harold & Jennifer (Brianna, Collin, Jayden, Kaleigh), Rachel & Mark denBak (Cole), Ed (Daniel), Emily & Peter VanderVelde.
Clara & Gary Wielink - Michael & Natashia (Corey, Shania, Darian, Chloe)
Alice & Jerry Evers
Henry Wielink - Keith & Suzanne (Alana, Taylore, Lukas, Tristan), Alicia & Murray Ravensbergen (Michael, Nathan), Ken & Faye Struyk (Kayla, Leah, Noah), Henry & Heather, Sarah & Ryan Smit (Brindley).
Ed & Alice Kelly - Harm & Annette (Joshua, Hannah), Edward & Maria (Hailey, Tyler) Alida & Ian Bos (Alliyah), Rosalee, Melissa, Matthew, Andrew.
Henry & Roeli Kelly - Harold & Rhonda (Olivia, Paige), Jacob, Rebecca, Henry, John, Aileen, Rosalynn, Ruth, Esther.
Harold & Riemke Kelly - Harold & Chantel (Shana, Derek, Emily) David, Hendrick, Anneke, Laura, Michelle.
John & Sietske Kelly - Harm & Patrina (engaged), Tsjibbe, Edward, Amy, Hendrick, Michael.
Janet & Glenn Oosterhof - Alissa, Miranda, Glenn.
Mailing Address: RR 8, Dunnville ON N1A 2W7

Classifieds

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION: CC is published on alternate Mondays. Copy deadline for each issue is 9 a.m. Tuesday, 13 days prior to publication date.
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Photos: \$25 (includes space it uses)
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OTHER INFORMATION: CC reserves the right to print classifieds using our usual format and editing style and is not responsible for any errors due to hand-written or phoned-in advertisements.

We are happy to announce the **60th Wedding Anniversary** of **ALBERT AND MARIA SEINEN** (nee Lubbelinkhof) July 18, 2007

Congratulations and love from your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren:
Grace & John Hols, *Houston, B.C.*
Lisa & David (Ivor), Jeff & Jenn, Laura & Josh (Ava)
Henry & Sylvia Seinen, *Houston, B.C.*
Jonathan & Jana (Liam), Sarah, Eric, Lucas
Ann & Ross Alexander, *Bend, Oregon*
Tim, Stefan
Lucy & Stan Spletzer, *Abbotsford, B.C.*
Lynnelle, Rhonda & Mark (Isaiah), Chris
Albert & Susan Seinen, *Houston, B.C.*
Ben, Terry, Jolene, Alison
Clarence & Bobby Seinen, *Houston, B.C.*
Joshua, Bailey, Clinton

We thank God for you and the many happy years we have all enjoyed together.
We wish you continued health and happiness!
Their home address is Box 24, Houston BC V0J 1Z0



Their wedding text was, and remains, Exodus 33:14-17: My presence will go with you and I will give you rest....

Thanking God for his faithfulness and grace, we wish to announce the **55th Wedding Anniversary** of our parents and grandparents, **BERNARD AND GRADA GROOT-NIBBELINK** (nee Heideman) on July 10, 2007.
Thank you Dad and Mom, Opa & Oma, for the blessing you've been to us through the years. We love you!
Bill & Tena Groot-Nibbelink (Sarah Joy, Nate & Christy)
Eric & Carolyn Groot-Nibbelink (Jenica, Michelle, Carissa)
Elna Groot-Nibbelink
Home address: RR 2, Bloomfield ON K0K 1G0

Obituary

Giving thanks for the life of **JOHAN B. BOSMAN**
Born February 9, 1928
Received into glory June 13, 2007
Colossians 1:12, 13, 14.

Beloved husband for over 55 years of Riek (Kraayenbrink) Bosman.

Loving father of
Rita & Eno Vandertil,
Ed & Tilda Bosman,
John & Edna Bosman,
Jack & Jane Bosman,
Ken & Brenda Bosman,
Arnold & Angela Bosman.
Loving Opa to 28 grandchildren plus 10 spouses, and 18 great-grandchildren.
Loving brother of Gerda & Henk Kuipery, Johanna & the late Henk Bent, Wilma & Riend Wikkerink and the late Johan Bernard Bosman.

Loving son of the late Edward & Johanna (Wiggers) Bosman.
The funeral service was held Saturday, June 16, 2007 at the Wallaceburg Christian Reformed Church.

Correspondence: Riek Bosman, 143 Andrew Ave, Wallaceburg ON N8A 5J3

Obituary

Keenly missed by her children and grandchildren:
George & Joyce, *Wellandport, Ont.*
Michael & Carrie (Nathan)
Kristen & Dave VanderBerg (Gabrielle)
Jeremy & Heidi
Neal & Tanya
Louise, *Toronto, Ont.*
Margaret & Henry Veld, *Fonthill, Ont.*
David & Sarah
Carolyn & Richard Saari (Mya)
Douglas
Theresa & William VanWijngaarden, *Toronto, Ont.*
Arie
Alice
Emma
Ellen
Marinus

Predeceased by her husband Hendrick 45 years ago and her granddaughter Sheri.
Her life was lived in devotion to God, and she especially loved to sew, garden, go for walks and do volunteer work.

Correspondence:
George DeRoo
RR 3
Wellandport ON L0R 2J0

Classifieds /Advertising

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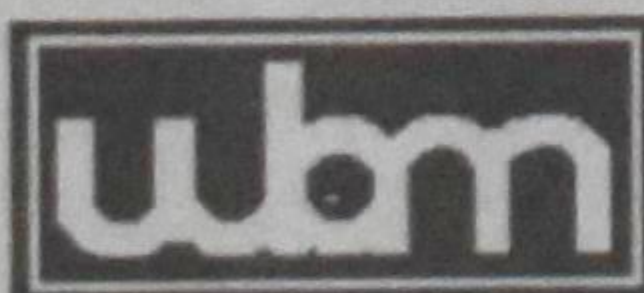
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News

Sunni and Shia families in Baghdad swap homes in bid to remain safe

BAGHDAD (IRIN) – Six months ago Sunni militants forced the Shia family of Baqir Zaidan Najim out of their house in Baghdad's southern Sunni-dominated suburb of Dora.

Two months earlier, Shia militiamen had broken into the house of the Sunni family of Abdul-Khaliq Mohammed Khayon, and told them they had 24 hours to leave Baghdad's northern Shia district of Kadhimiyah or "face death".

Since then, the two families had been moving from place to place seeking shelter with relatives or friends until late last month when the heads of the two families shook hands on a deal to swap houses.

Iraq's unprecedented turning point in relations between Sunni and Shia Muslims can be traced directly to February 22, 2006, when a revered Shia shrine in Samarra, 60 miles north of Baghdad, was bombed. Sunni extremists were blamed for the act.

The attack, which was repeated last month, spawned days of reprisals that damaged or destroyed dozens of mosques, killed hundreds and made thousands of families homeless, compounding the displacement problem created after the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

New role for estate agents

As a result, a new phenomenon has emerged: Sunni and Shia families are swapping houses. Estate agents are providing lists of available properties, facilitating swap arrangements.

"It is hard to leave the house you built and in which you spent your life raising your children, and which contains memories in every corner, but death is dreadful," said bearded Najim, a 52-year-old Shia pensioner and father of six boys.

"When I heard about house exchanges, I immediately started looking for a displaced Sunni family from Baghdad to take my house in Dora. After weeks of inquiries, I found an estate agent with a list of uprooted Sunni families looking to swap properties," he said.

"After a search of nearly a month, I was introduced to Najim at an estate agent's office and we each agreed to take the other's house for six months, but we left our furniture in our houses because many people have been attacked by militants while moving household belongings," said Khayon, a 49-year-old father of three girls.

According to their renewable deal,

which was drafted at the estate agent's office, the two families agreed to exchange their houses until the security situation improves.

"Booming" house swaps

"House swaps are booming," said an estate agent in Dora who arranged the Najim-Khayon deal but who did not want to be named for security reasons. "Since houses prices are declining due to the deteriorated security situation, families can't sell their houses and prefer to swap," he added.

He went on to say that since the beginning of the year he had housed 211 uprooted Sunni families in Dora and its suburbs "without any problems and all sides are satisfied".

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), since February 2006 about 822,810 Iraqis have been prompted to leave their homes and move to new areas in search of basic security. The figure is higher than the estimated figure of 600,000 issued by the Iraqi Ministry of Migration and Displacement.

Of these, about 40,000 families – or about 200,000 people – have fled their homes in Baghdad, a senior official at the ministry told IRIN – on condition of anonymity as he was not authorized to disclose numbers.

Houses seized

Other families, doubtful of such swap-deals or suspicious of the estate agents, try to find people with whom they can exchange their houses by putting out the word to relatives and family friends.

Some do not swap their homes but find families to stay in them before they flee. But there have also been problems.

Nadhim Mahmoud Ali, a 59-year-

old Shia doctor, fled his house in Baghdad's western Sunni suburb of Amiriyah in January and moved to the country's northern autonomous region of Kurdistan after finding a Sunni family to stay in his house.

"But a month later, he [the head of the Sunni family] started calling us asking permission to open all the rooms in the house, claiming that they don't have enough rooms. And then he started asking permission to sell our furniture to feed his family," Ali said.

"The latest shock was last month when he gave me a call to say that the Iraqi Islamic Party [an influential Sunni political group] had given him the house as it belonged to a Shia family and he was an uprooted Sunni," he added.

Similarly, houses of uprooted Sunni families have been turned over to displaced Shia families by the Mahdi army, a Shia militia loyal to radical religious leader Muqtada al-Sadr that has been blamed for sectarian killings.

Government crackdown

On February 24 the Iraqi government, which says it is seeking to end sectarian violence and the illegal seizure of homes in the capital, launched a new security crackdown called "Operation Imposing Law", in conjunction with US forces, to try to achieve its aims.

In a bid to stop the sectarian blood-letting, the government said those who had occupied the homes of displaced families would be given 15 days to return the properties to their original owners or prove they had permission to be there.

However, as the security operation enters its seventh month, there is little evidence so far of many people returning to their rightful homes.



This Baghdad house was owned by Abu Khalil. Now it is occupied by someone who bought it with fake documents and is protected by a militia.

News Digest

The law-breakers' reinforcements

Canada's police have discovered a new law-enforcement technique. When warned that natives were organizing to break the law by barricading highways and railroads, the police were one step ahead of them and barricaded the roads first.

I wonder, though, whether this might not produce copy-cat law-breaking. Right-to-Life protesters could decide to warn the police that they were about to blockade access to abortion clinics. To be consistent, wouldn't the police have to beat them to the punch and shut down the clinics before they could do so?

How long before environmental activists pick up on the strategy? If they felt that GM Canada was causing too much pollution, they could call the police hotline and say that they're about to barricade the plant. You wouldn't even need a very large organization.

It turned out that the number of natives involved in this major disruption to highway and rail traffic was extremely small. With the help of the police, a handful of natives managed to block one of Canada's major highways.

The police, however, might eventually think it disconcerting to find themselves working for lawbreakers.

Not that I blame the police for avoiding a showdown with natives. The government seems loth to stand behind officers who resort to force in many situations. Others may brandish weapons and threaten the lives of officers, but pity the officer who fires his weapon. He is in greater danger of having his career ruined than the criminal.

Of course, law enforcement has never been applied equally across the board. Striking unions, too, have always been allowed to get away with stretching or breaking the law.

About-face for the Conservatives

Private member Bill C-288 passed the Canadian Senate just before the summer recess. It calls for implementation of the Kyoto. Even though PM Harper has repeatedly said that adopting the provisions of the accord would devastate the Canadian economy, he appears ready to play along. He made a deal with the Liberal-dominated Senate that gave assent to the bill on climate change in return for passage of the 2007 federal budget without amendments.

Commentators, however, say that the government can adopt the Kyoto bill while largely ignoring its provisions. You can say Yes to Kyoto without putting your money where your mouth is. Of course, this is largely what the Liberals did with Kyoto too. But it sets a poor example. To pass laws without any intention of enforcing them is like exchanging marriage vows without any intention of being faithful to your spouse.

Oh, yeah, we're just about at that stage already aren't we?

For many of the signatories, Kyoto has become more of a matter of image, an expression of good intentions, or perhaps just wishing upon a star than a rigorous attempt to address the problems imposed by our runaway technologies.

New study on aging

We associate aging with getting frail and with losing energy and muscle strength. Not necessary, says the Johns Hopkins Center on Aging and Health. According to a large-scale study, much of it is the result of poor diet, prompted in part by being alone and by not getting out for exercise.

Dutch ancestry workshop

The Toronto Branch of the Ontario Genealogical Society will be holding a day-long workshop on Saturday, August 11, 2007, for family historians with Dutch ancestry. Further information and a downloadable registration form visit www.torontofamilyhistory.org/dutch.html.